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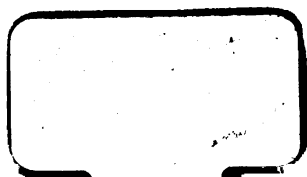
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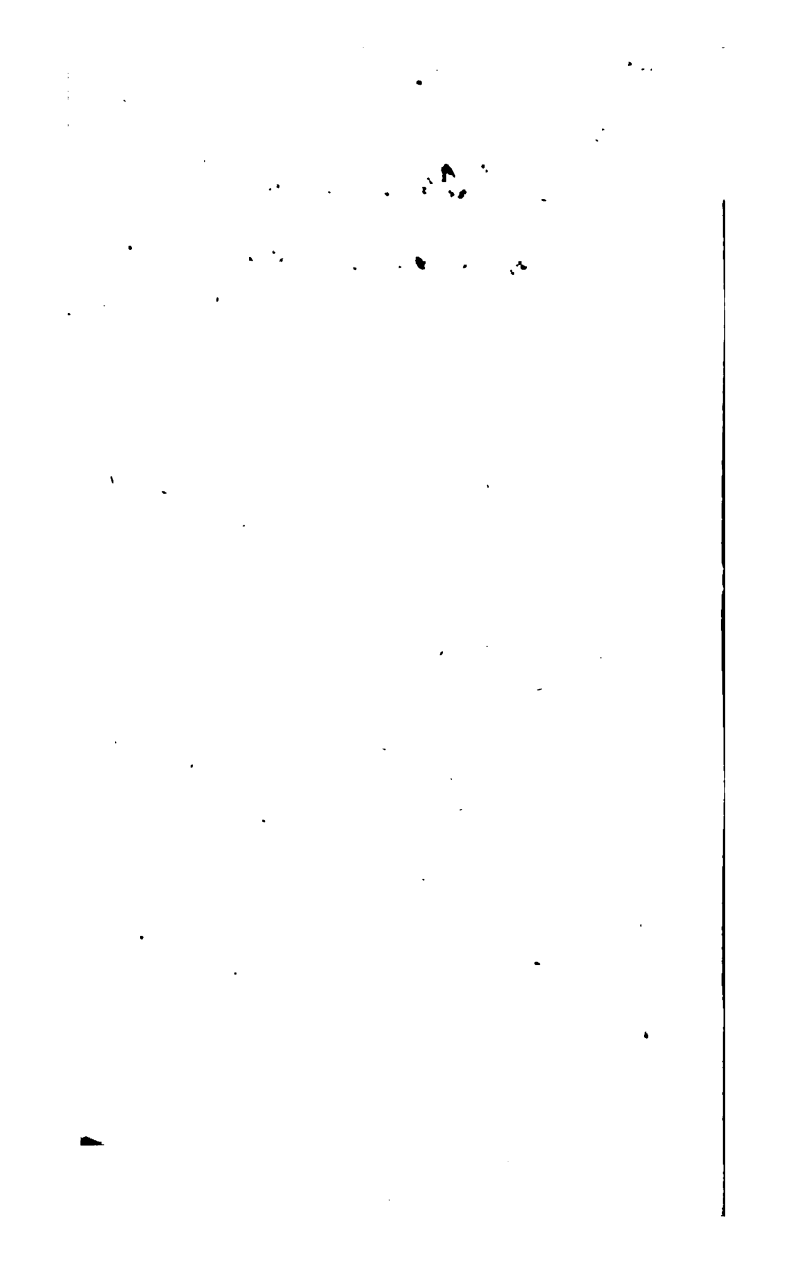




Edw A Dwyckwick
London - 1839

MEMOIRS
OF THE LATE
THOMAS HOLCROFT.

VOL. II.



MEMOIRS
OF THE LATE
THOMAS HOLCROFT,
Written by Himself,
AND CONTINUED
TO THE TIME OF HIS DEATH,
FROM HIS DIARY,
NOTES, AND OTHER PAPERS.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

London :

**PRINTED FOR LONGMAN, HURST, REES, ORME, AND
BROWN, PATERNOSTER-ROW.**

1816

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THE LIFE
OF
THOMAS HOLCROFT.

BOOK III.

CHAP. I.

MR. HOLCROFT, as he had intended, let part of his house, in Southampton Buildings, to lodgers. Among other inmates, were Miss Kemble (afterwards Mrs. Whitelocke) and his friend N——. Holcroft used to take frequent opportunities of urging this gentleman to devote his talents to works of taste and imagination, and his mind teemed with the plots of comedies and subjects of novels, which he wished his friend to write. But as Mr. N——'s pursuits

were of a totally different kind, it generally happened, that Holcroft himself, in the end, executed the works which he had planned for another. Of this kind was his first novel, entitled *Alwyn, or, the Gentleman Comedian*, which it was originally intended that Mr. N. should compile from materials to be furnished by Holcroft, but of which he, in fact, only wrote a few short letters, evidently very much *against the grain*.

This novel came out in the year 1780, in two small volumes, and was printed for Fielding and Walker. What terms he procured for it with the bookseller, I do not know ; its success was very moderate ; and it was to his own novel that Mr. Holcroft alludes, when he complains, in *Hugh Trevor*, that *Wilmot's* novel had been characterized in the *Monthly Review*, as “ a vulgar narrative of uninteresting occurrences.”

The most curious part of it is the account which Mr. Holcroft has inserted of some of his own adventures as a strolling actor ; for he himself is not the *Gentleman Comedian*. He has disguised his own name under that of Hil-kirk, and Alwyn is the hero of the piece. The story is as follows : Alwyn, a young man, who is patronized by a Mr. Stamford, in consequence of the friendship which had subsisted between him and Alwyn's father, who had saved his life, falls in love with Maria, the daughter of his guardian or master. His passion preys upon his health ; and, in order to conceal it from the family, and to try what absence may do towards effecting a cure, he determines to leave his patron's house, and commence comedian. Young Stamford, Maria's brother, is alone in the secret, and is the person to whom Alwyn addresses the account of his sub-

sequent adventures. Mr. Hil Kirk, on whose story our author has chosen to ingraft his own, in like manner, falls in love with his master's niece, is on this account, and for his frequenting spouting clubs and billiard rooms, discarded from his service as a clerk, and betakes himself to the stage. These two romantic youths correspond together, and endeavour to console one another, by comparing their mutual mishaps,—the pains of absence, poverty, and hopeless love. Alwyn proceeds to Kendal, where he is received by the inhabitants with extraordinary marks of attention; is supposed to be a gentleman in disguise; is envied by the players; and being invited to the assembly (a distinction never before allowed to any comedian), dances with a young, rich, lively widow, a West-Indian, who falls in love with him, and makes him an offer of her hand and

fortune. This the youth politely declines, his affections being irrevocably engaged to another ; and, in consequence of this, the lady being piqued by his refusal, enters into a plot against him in concert with one of the players (a veteran in the corps, who was offended that the part of Romeo, which he had played *for fifty years*, should be taken from him, and given to Alwyn). His pocket-book is searched ; the name of the lady's rival is discovered ; and a letter is dispatched to old Stamford, informing him of the liberties which Mr. Alwyn is said to have taken with his daughter's name, and the equal presumption he had shewn in paying his addresses to the anonymous writer of the epistle. This letter, which is believed, gives a death-blow to his hopes. Maria Stamford, who had secretly returned his passion, is ashamed of her folly ; the father is shocked ; and the brother is

incensed at the baseness and ingratitude of his friend. Another lover is now provided for Alwyn's mistress, the son of a Mr. Maitland, a rattling, thoughtless young fellow, who is not half sentimental enough for the young lady ; and is accordingly rejected by her. The father of young Maitland is represented as an odd character, a half-crazy humourist, who, like the people of Laputa, makes every thing a subject of mathematical demonstration. He calculates the height and size of meteors, and is made to follow every *ignis fatuus* that he sees, through bog and briar. His graceless son ties a lantern to the house-dog's tail, and sends his father on a bootless chace after it : the dog escapes from his keeper, gets in at the library window with his meteorological apparatus about him, and sets fire to the house. Maitland-Hall is converted into a heap of ruins ; and what is worse,

Mr. Maitland's strong-box, containing nearly all his property, is lost. Mr. Stamford, his son, and daughter, are on a visit there at the time; and Maria Stamford must have perished in the flames, but that Alwyn, the ungrateful, the supposed worthless Alwyn, who had left the Kendal company, and was travelling homeward, happens, at that instant, to be passing by, and comes in time to rescue his lovely mistress from the flames. He however remains unknown, and pursues his journey. Tom Maitland's fortune being thus dissipated by his frolic, it becomes a point of honour that Maria should give up her scruples, and join her hand to his; when this, now almost inevitable event, is put a stop to by a discovery,—that it was not the dog Pompey that had set fire to the house, but a gang of thieves, who had committed this flagrant act in order to carry off old Maitland's strong

box : that they had been detected, and their prize secured by the vigilance and activity of Alwyn's friend, Hil Kirk, who now appears to be the son of his former master, Seldon, and who is rewarded with the hand of his old sweet-heart, Julia Gowland, for the difficulties he has had to encounter, and to which he was purposely exposed by his father to enable him to bear adversity, and make a man of him. At the same time, Alwyn is recognized by a rich uncle, who adopts him as his heir; the story of the anonymous letter, and of his pretended treachery, is cleared up, and the whole ends happily in marriage.

There is in this story neither much probability nor much invention. The characters, such as they are, are tolerably supported: but some of the attempts at humour which are inserted, shock all common sense. Such are the accounts of the school-master, the

methodist parson, the mathematical calculation of the reasons for marrying, &c. These however were not written by Holcroft, but by his friend. The reason, why men of real and great abilities do not succeed in different kinds of writing, is perhaps, less for want of power, than of industry and inclination. They naturally set the highest value on that department of taste or genius, to which they have devoted themselves, and they have not respect enough for any other to take the pains necessary to excel in it. Thus the philosopher and man of science is apt to think he pays a sufficient compliment to the efforts of humour or fancy, if he only unbends his mind to engage in them; that any thing is good enough for a novel, or poem; and that the absence of wisdom is wit.

The character of Handford, Alwyn's uncle, is the most amusing and original

in the work: let it speak for itself.

This gentleman had conceived the idea of establishing a humane asylum for animals, the consequences of which he describes thus :

“ I am pestered, plagued, teased, tormented to death. I believe all the cats in Christendom are assembled in Oxfordshire. I am obliged to hire a clerk to pay the people, and the village where I live, is become a constant fair. A fellow has set up the sign of the three Blind Kittens, and has the impudence to tell the neighbours, that if my whims and my money only hold out for one twelve-month, he shall not care a fig for the king. I thought to prevent this inundation, by buying up all the old cats, and secluding them in convents and monasteries of my own: but the value of the breeders is increased to such a degree, that I do not believe my whole fortune is capable of

the purchase.—Besides, I am made an ass of. A rascal, who is a known sharper in these parts, hearing of the aversion I had to cruelty, bought an old, one-eyed horse, that was going to the dogs, for five shillings. Then taking a hammer in his hand, watched an opportunity of finding me alone, and addressed me in the following manner : ‘ Look you, master, I know that you don’t love to see any dumb creature abused, and so, if you don’t give me ten pounds, why I shall scoop out this old rip’s odd eye, with the sharp end of this here hammer, now, before your face.’ Aye, and the villain would have done it too, if I had not instantly complied: but what was worse, the abominable scoundrel had the audacity to tell me, when I wanted him to deliver the horse first, for fear he should extort a farther sum from me, that he had more honour than to break his

word. A whelp of a boy had yesterday caught a young hedge-hog, and perceiving me, threw it into the water to make it extend its legs; then with the rough side of a knotty stick, sawed upon them till the creature cried like a child; and when I ordered him to desist, told me he would not, till I had given him six-pence. There is something worse than all this. The avaricious rascals, when they can find nothing that they think will excite my pity, disable the first animal which is not dignified with the title of christian; and then bring it to me as an object worthy of commiseration; so that in fact, instead of protecting, I destroy. The women have entertained a notion that I hate two-legged animals: and one of them called after me the other day, to tell me I was an old rogue, and that I had better give my money to the poor, than keep a parcel of dogs and

cats that eat up the village. I perceive it is in vain to attempt carrying on the scheme much longer, and then my poor invalids will be worse off than they were before."

This account was probably intended by the author as an indirect satire upon his friend Ritson's arguments on the inhumanity of eating animal food.

Mr. Holcroft may now be considered as having commenced regular author; or in other words, he now began to write constantly for the booksellers. He was employed by them to write a pamphlet, under the name of Wm. Vincent, Esq. of Gray's Inn, containing an account of the riots in 1780. For this purpose he had attended the trials at the Old Bailey, where he was the means of saving the life of an innocent man, who was brought there as a prisoner. I have heard Mr. Holcroft mention this circumstance, with tears of pleasure at the recollection. One

of his most habitual feelings was a strong sense of the value of human life ; and his having been in more than one instance an instrument in saving it, was a subject of the most grateful reflection to him.

A young man was brought to the bar, and tried as one of the rioters. The witness against him swore, that as he was standing in a shop, where he had taken refuge, at the bottom of Holborn, he saw the prisoner coming down Holborn Hill, at the head of a body of rioters, with a drawn sword in his hand, which he brandished furiously in the air. The witness swore positively to the facts, and there is little doubt that the prisoner would have been found guilty, if by great good fortune Mr. Holcroft, who was taking notes of the evidence, had not recollected the prisoner's face. He felt himself much agitated while the evidence was giving ; and when it was over, he addressed the

judge, and begged that he might be admitted as an evidence, for that 'e had something very material to depose to the prisoner's innocence. He then declared that he had been present at the real transaction; that he had been standing at the corner of one of the streets near the bottom of Holborn, when the rioters passed; that the prisoner was not one of them, but that some time after they were gone by, he had seen the prisoner, who was walking quietly along the street, pick up a sword, which had probably been dropped in some scuffle by one of the rioters, and carry it away with him. This he said was the whole of the transaction, and that the circumstances of his marching at the head of the mob, and brandishing the sword in a threatening manner, were utterly false. This evidence was so clear and satisfactory, that the man was acquitted. Loughborough was the

judge on this occasion. Mr. Holcroft used to mention another anecdote which happened at the same time, when the prisoners were tried and convicted in that wholesale way, and upon such slender evidence, that it was not easy for them to escape, whether guilty or not. A man with a strong, stern, sensible countenance, after sentence of condemnation had been passed upon him, muttered to himself, in a scarcely audible voice, and evidently without intending to excite any one's notice; "Short and sweet—innocent by G-d!"

CHAP. II.

MR. Holcroft's first comedy, called *Duplicity*, was acted in October, 1781. It had been offered to Mr. Harris, and

came out at Covent Garden. The prologue was written by Mr. Nicholson. The applause it met with, both on the first night and afterwards, was very great. Mr. Holcroft's feelings on this occasion he has expressed in a manner honourable to himself in a letter to Mr. Greville, dated October 18, the day after it was acted.

“ SIR,

“ I received your very obliging letter last night, just as I was going to the theatre, and had not time to answer it till to-day. Indeed, Sir, I do not find myself so much flattered by the very favourable opinion which, as far as I am able to come at the truth, the town entertains of me, as I am by your friendship and kindness. It is true I have had great difficulties to encounter, and the unhappy effects of a narrow education to surmount: but to be thus distinguished is more than a

compensation for the labour I have taken, and the conflicts I have had with poverty, obscurity, and their dismal attendants. I am successful—I am happy—I shall acquire the means of making my father, my family, and some of my friends happy. These are the purest sources of pleasure, and which, as I have reason to know, both you and Mrs. Greville most intimately feel. My greatest danger is the possibility of not supporting the new character I have undertaken, with that equanimity, moderation, and ease, which are so essential to real worth. Vanity is continually spreading the net for pride, and those who are never entrapped, are either very strong or very cunning. To be successful, I have now only to be industrious: having escaped the Dog of Hell, the Elysian Fields are before me, if I have but taste and prudence to select the sweets.

But this egotism is a species of the folly I have been declaiming against."

Mr. Greville, it may be necessary to add here, had perused Mr. Holcroft's piece before it came out, and had suggested some alterations both in the plot and language. Several were also made by Mr. Holcroft in the course of the rehearsals, and more by Mr. Harris; some of them against the author's judgment.

Mr. Holcroft now considered his fame as established, and his fortune as already made. The author of a successful and admired comedy he thought had a passport which would carry him securely through the world. In these flattering hopes, he was unhappily deceived.

He also wrote on the same day to his father, in terms which his success and the warmth of his affection dictated.

"MY DEAR FATHER,

"I know that a short letter.

will be acceptable to you rather than none, especially on this occasion. My piece is come out at Covent Garden Theatre under the title of Duplicity. You may perhaps have heard some account of its reception from the newspapers: its success has been very flattering, and no circumstance relative to it gives me more satisfaction than that I shall now be enabled to provide for my dear father."

Only three days after the date of the preceding letters, his brilliant prospects were dissipated, and we find him addressing the following letter to Mr. Harris.

"SIR,

"It is with reluctance I begin to write to you on the present subject: but my feelings are too powerful to be resisted. My labours have been great; my cares, hopes, and fears innumerable, and just at the moment

when I was to be rewarded, to see my golden dreams vanish, to have the blessings I had so hardly earned snatched from me, is more than I can support in silence. It is not now, Sir, vanity in me to say the comedy is deserving of reward, every body says so, many say much more, at least to me. Had it been brought out at a good time of the year, I should not have gained less than five hundred pounds by it. But to be played at the most barren of all seasons, and when the fineness of the weather concurs to make it still worse, is certainly a severe fate; and I appeal to you, Sir, whether it is a misfortune, the whole weight of which should be borne by a man who has strained every faculty, and endured every kind of mental torture to give others pleasure. Again, though I have no doubt but you thought it best, yet it is the opinion of every body that the playing the

piece at intervals, so contrary to the established mode, has thrown a damp upon it of the most stagnating kind. There is not a person I meet, who does not ask the reason with a face of wonder. This you know was not with my judgment, nay, I was exceedingly vexed when I first saw another play advertised over its head. What added still more to the surprise of the town, was to hear it given out for Tuesday, and to see it put off till Wednesday, in order to give place to an old piece, of which they therefore concluded you had greater expectations than of the new comedy. They could not know your real motive. The concluding stroke thus far finishes this melancholy tragedy. You told me my night should be on the Friday or Saturday; I objected to the first, and you agreed to the other: but circumstances alter—you allege the business of the theatre—

I am obliged to take the Friday, and King Arthur, with every force of novelty, dress, decoration, &c. &c. is opposed to me at a time when there is scarcely one full audience of play-going people in town. The consequence is, the profits of my first and best night are twenty pounds. I appeal to you, Sir, whether I have not a claim to some reparation. I wish you to allow me a certain sum for my nights; what, I leave to your candour. My hopes are so lowered that my views now are not very extravagant. If you think I have reason, you will be kind enough to inform me what you think proper to give; and then, Sir, you will do with the piece whatever you think fit."

The next night that the comedy was played for the author's benefit, it did not clear the expenses of the house; and Mr. Harris then said, that unless it was commanded by the king, he should

not think of playing it any more ; but, at the same time, desired Mr. Holcroft to draw on the theatre for a hundred pounds. This sum, with the price which he got for it from the booksellers, was all that he cleared by this his first comedy. It was shortly after published with a very well written preface.

Mr. Harris appears to have behaved in a liberal and friendly manner on this occasion. Mr. Holcroft afterwards called on him, and he proposed that the play should be laid by for a time, till he had a strong afterpiece to play with it. This set Mr. Holcroft's imagination at work again, and he conceived the idea of writing a pastoral, and laying the scene in Ireland, so as to have an opportunity of introducing all the good Irish music. I do not know whether he ever executed this idea.

After the appearance of *Duplicity*, Mr. Holcroft wrote to Mr. Linley to

decline singing in the choruses and oratorios. His salary had been raised by Mr. Sheridan to two pounds a week, but still Mr. Holcroft seems to have been dissatisfied with not being brought forward in considerable parts; and he entertained thoughts of going to Ireland as an actor, unless a more respectable class of characters was assigned him at the theatre. He seems to have thought it inconsistent, not only with his dignity, but with his interest, as an author, to appear only in the lowest and most insignificant parts. I ought to have mentioned above, that when his own play of *Duplicity* was acted at the other house, Mr. Wewitzer being taken ill, he had played the part of Vandervelt at an hour's notice, which he continued to do afterwards. He also tried to procure an engagement with Mr. Colman this year at the Haymarket, but I believe ineffectually.

A project, which about this time engaged a good deal of Mr. Holcroft's attention, and excited very sanguine hopes in him, was the pretended discovery of the polygraphic art. The person who set this plan on foot, as we have before noticed, was Booth, the manager of one of the theatrical companies to which Mr. Holcroft had belonged. He undertook, by some mechanical process, to produce copies of the old masters, such as Titian and Rubens, which, both in colour and execution, should not be distinguishable from the originals, and which were to be sold as cheap, or cheaper, than a common coloured print. This certainly was promising great things, if the performance had been answerable. Mr. Holcroft was so full of this scheme, and of the golden advantages it held out, that Booth having applied to him to assist him in it, and become a part-

ner in the profits, he wrote to Mr. Greville, informing him of his sudden good fortune; and indeed offering him a share in so lucrative an undertaking. Mr. Greville, however, seems to have thought the success not so certain; and it was not long before Mr. Holcroft began to incline to his opinion. In his next letter to this gentleman, he confesses that he entertained some doubts on the subject, especially since he had heard that the same scheme had been tried before, and had failed; and farther, that they were not half a dozen artists in the kingdom, *who could copy the best pictures well enough to make it an object.* In fact, this last observation betrayed the real secret: after an imperfect outline, or rude sketch, had been struck off by a mechanical operation, any bungling artist, who could be found to do it cheap enough, was employed to finish the picture. So that, after all,

this new mode of superseding the necessity of copying the old masters, was nothing more than an attempt to set up a cheap wholesale manufactory of bad copies of good pictures.—Mr. Holcroft, however, though his ardour very soon cooled, was willing to wait till he had seen the specimens which Mr. Booth was busy in making of some famous picture, but which he was very backward in producing. The subsequent fate of this polygraphic scheme is well known to the public. To excuse Mr. Holcroft's credulity on this occasion, it may be remarked, that it was long before he had paid any particular attention to the subject of painting; that he was really and truly a novice in the art; and, probably, would not have been much struck himself with the difference between one of these polygraphic imitations and a real Titian or Rubens.

CHAP. III.

IN the years 1781 and 1782, Mr. Holcroft published a poem called the Sceptic, and the Family Picture,* a collection of tales, partly compiled, and partly original. Neither of these works seems to have held a very high place in his estimation. Of the former he says, in a letter to a friend, that it was

* The Family Picture, I think, from memory, was published by Lockyer Davis, in 1781, and the Sceptic a year or more afterwards. The latter work has no plan, but in some parts it shews a more extensive power of imagination and strength of general induction, than he had before exhibited in any of his writings.—The colloquial language of the connecting parts of his Family Picture, is poor and inelegant; and has none of that easy, clear, and unaffected spirit which characterizes his Tales of the Castle, and still more his Hugh Trevor.

written in haste ; that he believes it ought to have been treated according to Horace's maxim, " Prematur nonum in annum ;" and that though he was pleased with some parts in the writing, he is afraid he should not be so in the reading of them. Of the Tales he says, that he did not expect to increase his reputation by them, though he hoped he should not lessen it.

About this time an offer was made him by Mr. Greville to reside in his house, which he had the good sense respectfully to decline. He observed, that it was difficult for people with the best tempers and intentions, and who are upon a perfect equality, to live together, without harbouring little disgusts, or fancying supposed neglects ; and that with respect to himself, he was conscious of whims and peculiarities which it was his duty to keep behind the curtain as much as possible.

His sole reason, therefore, for declining Mr. Greville's offer, he declared, was the fear of declining in his good opinion by accepting it.

His mind now teemed with dramatic projects, plots, characters, and incidents. His ambition was to write elegant comedy; and he was sensible of the disadvantages under which he laboured in this respect, both from education, and the sphere of life in which he had hitherto chiefly moved. He wished to get a nearer and more intimate view of the manners of high life, that he might be able to describe its refinements, or ridicule its absurdities, with more effect. He also wished, for the same reason, to acquaint himself, by actual observation, with foreign manners. Both these ends would be answered by obtaining admission into the Ambassador's suite, which was then (1783) setting off for Paris; and he

made application to several persons of consequence for this purpose, but without obtaining his immediate object. He however so far succeeded as to obtain some respectable introductions abroad.

Lord Carmarthen was at first talked of as Ambassador ; and Mr. Holcroft, by the interest of Mrs. Harcourt and Mrs. Greville, had an interview with his lordship ; in which he was informed, that another person had been fixed upon to go to Paris. This was the Duke of Manchester ; and he now applied to the Duchess of Devonshire, I believe through Mrs. Siddons, for a recommendation to the Duke to go out with him as under-secretary, or in any other situation, in which he might be of service as a literary man. He stated that a salary was not his object, and that his only motive was to gain some little knowledge of the manners of a court, and of foreign countries. The only ad-

vantage he reaped from this application was, that he obtained the honour of some commissions to execute for her Grace at Paris, and the notice of one or two persons of consequence while he was there.*

Mr. Holcroft being still determined

* To dance attendance on the great seems, at this period of his life, to have been very much Mr. Holcroft's fate; but it certainly was an office for which he was by nature but indifferently fitted. In the present instance, his chief solicitude was to obtain an insight into the character and pursuits of the fashionable world. The ordeal he went thro' for this purpose, must frequently have been a severe one to his feelings. But as far as his present object was concerned, even the repulses he met with, or the distance at which he was kept, would still in some measure advance him towards the end he had in view. He seems to have profited by his experience, and has left several lively sketches of that part of the manners of the great, which relates to their intercourse with men of letters. I do not know that the following picture is true in all its particulars, but the general feelings it describes, were suggested to him by the reception he met

on a visit to the continent, procured an engagement with the editor of a news-

with on his application to the Duchess of Devonshire.

“ On another occasion, an actress, who, strange to tell, happened, very deservedly, to be popular; and whom, before she arrived at the dignity of a London theatre, I had known in the country, recommended me to a duchess. To this duchess I went day after day; and day after day was subjected for hours to the prying, unmannered insolence of her countless lacqueys. This time she was not yet stirring, though it was two o'clock in the afternoon; the next, she was engaged with an Italian vender of artificial flowers; the day after, the prince, and the devil does not know who beside, were with her; and so on, till patience and spleen were at daggers drawn. At last, from the hall I was introduced to the drawing-room, where I was half amazed to find myself. Could it be real? Should I, after all, see a creature so elevated; so unlike the poor compendium of flesh and blood with which I crawled about the earth? Why, it was to be hoped that I should! Still she did not come; and I stood fixed, gazing at the objects around me, longer perhaps than I can now

paper, the Morning Herald, to send over paragraphs, relating to the events

well guess. The carpet was so rich, that I was afraid my shoes would disgrace it! The chairs were so superb, that I should insult them by sitting down! The sofas swelled in such luxurious state, that for an author to breathe upon them would be contamination! I made the daring experiment of pressing with a single finger upon the proud cushion, and the moment the pressure was removed, it rose again with elastic arrogance; an apt prototype of the dignity it was meant to sustain. Though alone, I blushed at my own littleness! Two or three times the familiars of the mansion skipped and glided by me; in at this door, and out at that; seeing, yet not noticing me. It was well they did not, or I should have sunk with the dread of being mistaken for a thief, that had gained a furtive entrance, to load himself with some parcel of the magnificence, that to poverty appeared so tempting! This time, however, I was not wholly disappointed: I had a sight of the duchess, or rather a glimpse. 'Her carriage was waiting. She had been so infinitely delayed by my lord and my lady, and his highness, and Signora!—Was exceedingly sorry!—

of the day, public amusements, fashions, &c. for which he was to have a guinea and a half a week; and a similar engagement with a printer, Mr. John Rivington, to furnish him with notices of new works, translations, &c. It was

Would speak to me another time, to-morrow at three o'clock, but had not a moment to spare at present, and so vanished!' Shall I say she treated me proudly, and made me feel my insignificance? No; the little that she did say was affable; the tone was conciliating, the eye encouraging, and the countenance expressed the habitual desire of conferring kindness. But these were only aggravating circumstances, that shewed the desirableness of that intercourse which to me was unattainable. I say to me, for those who had a less delicate sense of propriety, who were more importunate, more intruding, and whose forehead was proof against repulse, were more successful. By such people she was besieged; on such she lavished her favours, till report said that she impoverished herself; for a tale of distress, whether feigned or real, if obtruded upon her, she knew not how to resist."—Hugh Trevor, Vol. iii.

so arranged, that his salary from the newspaper office should be received by Mrs. Holcroft in his absence, for the immediate use of the family, and Rivington was to supply him with money for his expenses at Paris.

Mr. Holcroft's family consisted, at this time, of his wife and four children, only one of whom, Fanny, was by his present wife. Ann, the eldest, was by his first wife, and Sophy and William were by his second wife, whom he lost just before he left the country.

The two children, after her death, were for some time under the care of their uncle and aunt, Mr. and Mrs. Tipler, at Nottingham. When Mr. Holcroft became settled in Southampton Buildings, they were sent for up to town. The boy William was his greatest favourite: he was now (1783) between nine and ten years old; he was a very forward and intelligent child,

could speak French with tolerable fluency, and his father, in order to perfect him in the language, determined to take him with him, and afterwards to leave him at a boarding-school in France.

Matters being thus arranged, Mr. Holcroft set out for Paris in the beginning of April, 1783, which place he reached a few days after. The first appearance of this capital does not seem to have answered his expectations. He complained of the narrowness and dirtiness of the streets, of the meanness of the shops, and of the unfinished state of the principal public buildings. His chief attention, however, was directed to the discovery of new publications, of several of which he proposed translations to Rivington, most of which he afterwards executed for another bookseller. Among these were the *Tales of the Castle*, by Madam Genlis,

Caroline of Litchfield, *The Amours of Peter the Long*, *Memoirs of De Tott*, *Savary's Travels in Egypt*, *An Account of the Manners and Treatment of Animals*, by D'Obsonville, &c. This last publication he recommends as a curious work in a letter to Mr. Greville; and observes, that from the account there given, it is evident that the New-market jockeys had learned the first principles of their art from the Arabs. His translation of the *Tales of the Castle* went through several editions, and introduced Mr. Holcroft to a correspondence, and afterwards to a personal acquaintance with the authoress. Most, if not all of these translations, were done for the Robinsons.

Mr. Holcroft made several friends at Paris, the chief of whom were Mercier, and a Mr. Bonneville, (the translator of the *Theatre Allemand*) of whom he had a high opinion; but Bonneville af-

terwards came to England, and they quarrelled. Of Mercier, the celebrated author of the Dramas, and *The Year 2500*, there will be occasion to speak hereafter. Either through these friends, or through the letters he brought with him, he was introduced to several persons of rank and literary pretension. Among them were the Duke and Duchess of Chartres, the Count de Catuelan, the Chevalier Macdonald, the Marquis de Dampiere, and others. He was desired by the Duke and Duchess of Chartres to read some scenes of Shakspeare to themselves and friends, with which he says they seemed more than satisfied. He appears afterwards to have entered into some discussion with the Count de Catuelan with respect to the comparative merits of Shakspeare and the French poets; for on the 24th of June, he addressed a short note to the Count, with a poem enclosed, on

this subject. I shall here insert both, as well to shew the zeal with which Mr. Holcroft defended his great countryman while abroad, as for the sake of the manner in which it is done.

“ SIR,

“ The conversation we had on Sunday morning concerning Rousseau, Voltaire, Shakspeare, &c. started an idea as I was returning home, which I immediately put into the form you see. I would not have you suppose, Sir, I mean to depreciate the talents of Voltaire; that is far from my intention; I would only vindicate the poet who of all others within my sphere of knowledge, and as far as my judgment extends, is infinitely the greatest. I should have sent you the verses before, because I know your reverence for my favourite bard,* but that I kept

* The Count was at the head of that party in France, who either did, or affected to admire Shakspeare.

them to see if after sleeping two or three nights I still thought them fit to be read. I am yet in doubt; for any thing middling on such a subject is contemptible. However, I have not yet shewn them to any person, except you, Sir, and Mr. Bonneville, at whose lodgings they were written.

“ Clad in the wealthy robes his genius wrought,
 In happy dreams was gentle Shakspeare laid;
 His pleas'd soul wand'ring through the realms of
 thought,
 While all his elves and fairies round him play'd.

Voltaire approach'd—strait fled the quaint-eyed
 band,

For Envy's breath such sprites may not endure:
 He pilfer'd many a gem with trembling hand;
 Then stabb'd the bard to make the theft secure.

Ungrateful man! Vain was thy black design:
 Th' attempt and not the deed thy hand defiled.
 Preserv'd by his own charms and spells divine,
 Safely the gentle Shakspeare slept and smiled.”

The conception of this little allegorical fiction, is certainly a very happy one, and the execution is no less spirited and elegant. With respect however to the enthusiasm with which Englishmen generally endeavour to persuade foreigners of the superlative excellence of our great dramatist, unless where it is taken up in self-defence, it is undoubtedly a species of quixotism, and of the most hopeless kind.

The remittances which Mr. Holcroft was to receive from his employer, were not so regular as he had expected. Indeed there seems to have been some unaccountable neglect on the part of Rivington,* and Mr. Holcroft would

* It was not Rivington the Bookseller, but John Rivington, the Printer, of St. John's Square, who died about the time of Mr. Holcroft's return, or (I believe) before it. He was one of the sons of Mr. Rivington, then bookseller of St. Paul's Church Yard, whose other sons still carry on the business

have been reduced to very great distress, had it not been for the generous assistance afforded him by his friend Bonneville, who was himself in no very affluent circumstances. He was at last wearied out with the state of suspense and dependence in which he was kept, and in October he took the resolution of again returning to England. He however left his son behind him at a school, in or near Paris.

of book-selling. Mr. John Rivington engaged in an agreement, or adventure with Mr. Holcroft, that works were to be selected, and translated by him, and published for their joint and equal account, he (Mr. Rivington,) advancing money to Mr. Holcroft, as a loan for his expenses.—The reason why he was not punctual in his remittances was, that he was much distressed for money to carry on his own extensive business of printing. John Rivington was a good-natured, worthy man, much esteemed by his friends. He died before the middle period of life, of a typhous fever, some time about the year 1785, or 1786.

Before Mr. Holcroft went from England, he had left an opera, called the Noble Peasant, in the hands of Mr. Colman, then manager of the Haymarket theatre. This had been accepted; and such was Mr. Colman's opinion of it, that on his return, he advanced Mr. Holcroft a hundred pounds, in the expectation of its future success. This piece was acted the ensuing season, (in 1784). The evening it was acted, Mr. Holcroft had placed himself behind the scenes, as authors generally do, to watch the progress of the piece, or be of occasional assistance. At the end however of the first act, the effect produced on the audience seemed so discouraging, and disapprobation began to manifest itself so strongly, that Mr. Holcroft could no longer stand it. He left the theatre, quite hopeless of success, and went and walked for an hour in St. James's Park.

He had by this time so far mastered the agitation of his spirits, that he returned to the Haymarket, tolerably resigned to his fate. He got in just at the conclusion of the third act, and was most agreeably surprised, when he heard the house resounding with applause, and saw himself surrounded by the actors and others, who came to congratulate him on the complete success of the piece.—It however only ran eleven nights. It was then stopped by Mr. Colman, in consequence of a disagreement with the author, whom he had without reason suspected of writing some paragraphs in the Morning Herald against *The Connoisseurs*. Mr. Holcroft soon after vindicated himself so fully from this charge, that Mr. Colman was satisfied.*

*I believe it is in *The Connoisseurs*, that a yawning scene was introduced by the author, who being

The success of this opera was not certainly equal to its merits, which are considerable. It seems to have given rise to a succession of plays of the same kind, the scene of which is laid in the ages of chivalry, and which represent the costume, characters, and manners of remote times. Such particularly have been the *Battle of Hexham*, *The Mountaineers*, *The Venetian Outlaw*, &c. This opera is in fact a romance dramatised.—A young peasant joins some outlaws, who are no other than the famous archers, Adam Bell, Clym

also the manager, found great difficulty in getting it acted to his mind. He was met one morning by Macklin, coming out from a rehearsal, and looking rather discontented, the other asked what was the matter? “I can’t get these fellows to *yawn*,” was the answer. “Oh if that’s all, said Macklin, you have only to read them the first act of *The Man of Business* ;” a dull play of that name, by Colman.

of the Clough, and Will Cloudesley; and soon after, has an opportunity together with them, to defeat a band of Danes, who were proceeding to attack the castle of Earl Walter, which lies in the neighbourhood of Sherwood. The cause of this quarrel is, that Anlaff the Dane had demanded Edwitha, the daughter of Earl Walter, in marriage, and had been refused. On this he determines to enforce his claim, and in the battle which ensues, Earl Walter's men under his son Harold are nearly vanquished, when they are unexpectedly joined by the outlaws and Leonard, the noble peasant, who slays Alric, the brother of the Danish chief. This youth who in addition to his warlike achievements, is represented with all the grace and amiableness of an Arcadian swain, is the first who by chance communicates the news of the victory to Edwitha, and her cousin

Adela, who had wandered to a little distance from the castle. Edwitha is immediately smitten with the manly appearance, and modest demeanour of Leonard, the peasant, and is rallied a good deal on the subject, by her witty and merciless cousin, who puts the reader somewhat in mind of the character of Beatrice. Adam Bell, and his renowned compeers, in consequence of their service in the battle, conceive a plan for being reconciled to Earl Walter; and for this purpose, Adam Bell goes to the castle in the disguise of a Friar, to watch for some favourable opportunity of obtaining a pardon. Harold and his followers return, and one of these, Earl Egbert, a ridiculous, cowardly braggart, pretends to have slain Anlaff, whose sword and armour he has carried in a pompous manner before him by his Dwarf. This story is contradicted by the pretended friar,

who says that he had shrieved a young peasant an hour before, who confessed that he had slain the Danish warrior. However, on the strength of the boasted service he had done, Earl Egbert lays claim to Earl Walter's daughter; and his pretensions are admitted by the father, in opposition to the most earnest remonstrances of the young lady. The valiant Earl accordingly remains at the castle, to court his froward mistress, while Harold, with his chosen friends, sets out to hunt for a few days on Cheviot Hills. The Danes hearing of his absence, and in revenge for the death of Alric, once more attack the castle, through which the greatest terror prevails, and particularly in the breast of Egbert; when Adam Bell takes the opportunity to discover himself to Earl Walter, and on obtaining promise of pardon, winds his bugle-horn, and is immediately joined by his

friends who had watched without the castle, and among the rest by Leonard. A challenge is now sent from Anlaff, to the conqueror of his brother, to meet him in single combat, on the conditions, that if defeated, his followers are immediately to withdraw from the castle, but that if victorious, he is to bear off Edwitha as his prize. This message startles Earl Egbert, and he is going to disclaim his share in the death of Alric; when Leonard persuades him to accept the challenge, by offering to exchange armour privately with him, and meet the haughty Dane in his stead. They fight, and victory declares in favor of Leonard. Just before the battle, a letter conveyed by an arrow, had fallen at the feet of Edwitha, conjuring her to pray for the success of Leonard the peasant, which had occasioned some surprise. The riddle is now explained, and Leonard, the conqueror

of Anlaff and Alric, and the preserver of her house, lays claim to the hand of Edwitha, as his reward. To this there are insuperable obstacles in the meanness of his origin; but this difficulty is soon removed by a discovery, that though disguised as a peasant, he is the son of a noble warrior. Harold returns, the marriage is celebrated, the outlaws are pardoned, and nothing but happiness reigns through the castle of Earl Walter.

The story of this little piece is interesting, and natural, as far as a romantic story can be so. The dialogue is well supported throughout, particularly in the comic parts; and though there are frequent imitations of Shakespeare, both in the incidents, characters, and speeches, yet they are very happily executed, with much wit and fancy; which shew that the author had imbibed the spirit of the poet, in whose

steps he treads. The songs, both the serious and humorous ones, have great merit; and were most of them set by Shield, to whom Mr. Holcroft, in his preface to the opera, pays a very high and deserved compliment. I should add here, for the sake of those who take an interest in dramatic retrospections, that Parsons played Earl Egbert, and that the part of the Fool was performed by Edwin.

Mr. Holcroft's next piece came out at Covent Garden, and was called *The Cholerick Fathers*. This opera is inferior to the last. The scene is supposed to be in Spain, and the business of the play turns upon the testy disposition of two fathers, who suddenly break off a match between their children, just as they are going to sign the marriage-settlement. The merit of the piece consists chiefly in the easy impudence and vivacity of a valet, who forms a number of

schemes, and acts different characters, to out-wit the old gentlemen, and bring about a reconciliation. The plot is formed after the manner of the Spanish school, full of intrigue and difficulties: these are at last overcome with a good deal of ingenuity; and the denouement is both natural and unexpected.

Mr. Holcroft had for some time been concerned in the Wit's Magazine, for which he wrote a number of amusing articles: but he now declined his share in it, seeming determined to bend his mind wholly to works of greater moment.

CHAP. IV.

IN 1784, the marriage of Figaro, (*Marriage de Figaro*) by Beaumarchais, came out at Paris, where it was acted with

astonishing success. Mr. Holcroft no sooner received notice of this piece, than he formed the instant resolution of going over to France to procure a copy of it, in order to translate and adapt it to the English stage.

He arrived in Paris the latter end of September, 1784, and proceeded to the lodgings of his friend Bonneville, to whom he immediately communicated the object of his journey. They both set about the accomplishment of it directly, but they found it attended with greater difficulty than they had expected. The comedy had not been printed: therefore their first plan was to procure a manuscript copy, either at the theatre, or through some friend of the author. This attempt however they found fruitless, from the jealousy with which the managers of the French theatre prevented any copies from getting abroad. The only resource now re-

maining was to commit it to memory. And for this purpose, both Holcroft and his friend went to the theatre every night for a week or ten days successively, till they brought away the whole with perfect exactness. At night when they got home, each of them set down as much as he could recollect of a scene, and they then compared notes; if any difficulty occurred, it was determined the following evening. Another scene was brought away from the next representation in like manner, and the entire play was at length transcribed. It was necessary to proceed in this deliberate and cautious manner, as if they had attempted to take notes, or had continued to do so more than once, their design would probably have been suspected, and defeated by the interference of the police.

Mr. Holcroft was not, it seems,

quite confident of his success, till he had his manuscript safely deposited in his portmanteau, with which he immediately set out on his return home. No time was lost, and the acquisition Mr. Holcroft had made was the day after his arrival communicated to Mr. Harris, through the Robinsons. A meeting was appointed, and it was agreed that Figaro should, with all possible expedition, make his appearance in an English dress. The necessary metamorphosis was completed in a few weeks, and Figaro was acted at Covent Garden Theatre, under the title of the *Follies of a Day*, a little before the Christmas holidays. The reception of the new piece was equal to the sanguine expectations Mr. Holcroft had formed, and the pains he had taken to bring it forward. It continued to be acted without intermission for a considerable length of time, and is still one

of our most popular entertainments. It is needless here to give any account, or to speak of the merits of a piece so well known to the public, and for which we are indebted more to Mr. Holcroft's industry and enterprise, than to his genius as an author. It would be unjust, however, to suppose, that it is a mere literal translation. Many alterations were necessary to adapt it exactly to the taste of an English audience, and these were executed with much skill and felicity. Of all the pieces brought out by the author, this and the Road to Ruin have been the most successful. He received six hundred pounds for it at the theatre, besides a considerable sum for the copy-right, which was bought in at the time.

Mr. Holcroft himself played the part of Figaro the first night, in the absence of Mr. Bonner, for whom it was

designed, and who afterwards took it. Mr. Holcroft had before this given up his engagement at Drury Lane, but at what precise period I cannot tell.

The music of the only song in this piece, “Ah! well-a-day, my poor heart,” was by Shield. It became a great favourite; and Longman, coming to treat for the purchase of the music with Shield, who hesitated what price to ask, the other, half laughing, made him an offer of three and twenty dozen of wine for it; which terms were readily acceded to by Shield, it being more than he had at that time ever received for a song. Mr. Holcroft took the first opportunity of acquainting his friend Bonneville with the success of the undertaking in which he had been of such service to him. His letter is dated Dec. 28, 1784.

“Dear Bonneville, I am sure you will pardon my apparent neglect, when

you remember how exceedingly hard I have been obliged to labour since my arrival in England. Figaro has made his appearance, and is likely to be as great a favourite in London as in Paris. I wish most sincerely you were here to be a witness of his good fortune. I enclose a letter of exchange for 480 livres, on Girard and Co. bankers, Paris. The many obligations I have to your friendship, the pleasure I take in your company, and the fears I entertain lest your very virtues should lead you into irretrievable difficulties, make me earnestly desire to see you in England. Fortune seems at present disposed to smile upon my efforts; I only wish you were with me to participate her favours. I am sure you would be happy. Why will you not come? Billy has written to you, as you will see; you know he loves you, he has reason to do so; and though a child, I

hope he will not forget his obligation.* Pray do not fail to tell M. and Madame Mercier, that though I do not write, I remember them as they would wish to be remembered, that is, I remember their virtue and their friendship, and shall do while I live."

Mr. Holcroft had about this time considerable intimacy with several French literary characters; among others, with M. Berquin, the author of "The Children's Friend," who came over here to inspect the translation of his own work into English; and a Mr. Floscel, an unfortunate but worthy man, whose works he recommended to the public in a circular proposal. Mr. Floscel came over to England to procure some subscriptions to a consider-

* Mr. Holcroft, as it appears from this letter, had brought his son William with him from France.

able literary undertaking, but was attacked by a disorder which proved fatal to him soon after his arrival.

It may be proper to add here, that Mr. Holcroft had offered the marriage of Figaro to Drury Lane theatre, before he left England; but he had clogged this proposal with other conditions, which probably prevented its acceptance. This appears from a letter either to Mr. Sheridan or Mr. Linley, which may be worth insertion; both as it contains the first hints of a project of dramatic authorship, which has, I believe, been since acted upon at the other house, and as it is characteristic of Mr. Holcroft's unwearied industry in his different undertakings, and of the sanguine temper with which he encouraged the most distant prospects of success. It is necessary to observe in explanation of one part of the letter, that he had while in Paris

(in 1783), written a tragedy, the heroine of which he very anxiously wished to see personated by Mrs. Siddons, who was now in the height of her reputation.

“ SIR,

“ Not having been able to see you on the subject of the tragedy (Ellen, or the Fatal Cave) and being at present obliged to make a journey to Paris, I take the liberty of submitting the following proposals to your consideration. Besides the tragedy already presented, I have a comedy begun, which will be ready in a month after my return; that is, I will engage to give it in complete, some time in November.

“ My proposals then, Sir, are, instead of author's nights, to receive a salary, and that a very moderate one; for which, exclusive of the tragedy and comedy already mentioned, I will en-

gage to write any recitatives, songs, or choruses, which may be wanted for pantomimes, or other temporary occasions in the theatre. The terms I require are ten pounds per week, under the following provisos. If either the tragedy or comedy are condemned by the public, I will furnish an after-piece; should two out of the three miscarry, my salary shall be reduced to seven pounds per week; and should all three be unfortunate, to five; and to be in the receipt of only five pounds per week till one has succeeded, the arrears to be then paid. By this proposal Mrs. Siddons's nights will not be encroached upon. I, as an author, shall have the interest of the house at heart, and shall neglect no opportunity of promoting that interest:—the terms are so moderate, the probabilities I presume are greatly that the proprietors should gain, not lose. My own reputation will make

me exert myself to the utmost ; and with respect to my fulfilling the conditions proposed, I will enter into any forfeiture, not exceeding the receipt of my whole salary, to fulfil them literally. Indeed, whatever my talents may be, my industry and facility will not be disputed. I set off for France to-morrow morning, where, Sir, there is at present a most popular piece, ‘The Marriage of Figaro,’ which I shall endeavour to procure ; it will be to the advantage of the theatre to get first what I know is thought an object, and which, if these terms are agreeable to you, Sir, and the proprietors, I shall then be more earnest and expeditious, concerning. I must, however, add, I am by no means certain of obtaining it ; on the contrary, I understand it will be attended with great difficulties. I must intreat, Sir, that this proposal remain totally a secret, if not acceded

to ; otherwise it might injure me : and the fear lest it might by accident become known, was the only motive that prevented me from making it sooner. Should this meet your approbation, you will greatly oblige me to signify as much as soon as possible, by sending a line directed to me at Paris."

CHAP. V.

THE Comedy of Seduction appeared in the year 1787, and was received with very great applause. Some few hints for this play were taken from *Les Liaisons Dangereux* ; but it was chiefly original, and possessed great merit. In 1789, appeared the translation of the King of Prussia's works, in twelve or thirteen volumes, and also the

translation of the Essays of Lavater. For the former of these, Mr. Holcroft received 1200*l.* from Robinsons, the booksellers. He had worked almost night and day to get it out soon, and to prevent the possibility of anticipation. He had, I believe, very early, and before the publication of the original work, procured a copy, through the interest of the Prussian Ambassador. He complains, in one of his letters about this time, of the difficulty he had in translating the poetry of the great Frederic, for whom our author, though he translated his works, seems to have had no great predilection.* His

* Mr. Holcroft long projected a work, of which Frederick II. was to have been the hero, and the subject the effects of war and despotism. He made considerable preparations for this work; for he had completely lined a large closet with books, which were to furnish the materials, direct or collateral, for writing his history of *bad* governments.

translation of Lavater's smaller work has certainly been the means of making the English public acquainted with the system of that ingenious and lively writer; but it was criticised with unusual severity by the authors of the *Analytical Review*, and this led to some disagreeable altercation between Mr. Holcroft and the Reviewers.

In 1790, the *German Hotel* appeared at Covent Garden, a play which is little more than a translation from the German of Brandes. The plot is very neat and lively, and sometimes interesting: but there is very little besides plot and incident in the piece. Baron Thorck seems the counterpart of Squire Thornhill, in the *Vicar of Wakefield*. The most striking circumstance in this drama is the perfect preservation of the unities of time and place. In the present instance, this peculiarity adds to the natural effect of the scene by riveting

the imagination to one spot, and thus giving a sort of reality to it, and by making the incidents follow one another in such quick succession, that the mind has no time to question their probability. The events are some of them the most improbable that can be supposed ; yet such is the mechanical construction of the plot, that they seem inseparably interwoven with each other, and as if they could not happen otherwise. The whole play is like a scene really passing in a hall of a large Hotel, in the course of a few hours.

Mr. Holcroft brought out the Comedy of *The School for Arrogance*, in the beginning of 1791. In consequence of some disagreement between Mr. Holcroft and Mr. Harris respecting former pieces, it was imagined it would not be very graciously received if the author were known ; and a friend undertook for a time to *father* the piece.

After the comedy had been twice performed, the author wrote the following letter to the manager of the theatre. It is published in the preface.

“ SIR,

“ I have patiently waited the proper moment in which to write to you. That moment I hope is now come. I should be guilty of injustice, were I any longer to delay expressing my sense of the propriety with which you have acted relative to the School for Arrogance, after you had every reason to suppose it mine. Such conduct, Sir, is highly honourable; and is not only productive of the best effects, but must secure the best and most permanent applause. That you had conceived disadvantageous ideas of me, I knew; though I have no doubt, but I shall ultimately convince you, that, even supposing me to be mistaken, my

motives have been laudable. With me, you were irritated; but you had the justice to forget the man, and promote the interests of the piece. This I hold it my duty to say to the world at large.

“I am, Sir, &c.”

The School for Arrogance is, in its plan, founded on *Le Glorieux* of Destouches, but it is for the most part original. It is Mr. Holcroft's best play, with the exception of the Road to Ruin, and, perhaps, even this exception is doubtful. The last of these pieces is, no doubt, much more adapted for stage-effect; but I question whether the former would not be perused oftener, and with greater delight, in the closet. It is less eventful, less interesting, less showy and dazzling; but it has beauties more refined in the conception, and difficult in the execution. Such is the whole of the character of Count Co-

nolly Villars, which is managed throughout with the nicest art. His pride of birth ; the conflict between the feelings of love, and a sense of the honour of his family ; and the rapid and delicate alternations of passion, arising from a constant fear of degrading himself, either by resisting, or indulging the familiarity of others, are described without the violation of truth, perhaps, in a single instance. On the other hand, the contrast between the pride of wealth and that of ancestry, which the character of Lady Peckham gives the author an opportunity to display, has an effect equally forcible, whether we regard the immediate impression on the audience, or the moral lesson it conveys. The other characters are comparatively insignificant, though necessary and well supported. To expose the weaknesses of pride, as it is founded on the prejudice either of

wealth or ancestry, may be said to form the whole business of the piece. This, however, is not done by pompous, laboured declamation, or satirical epigrams; but by shewing the effects of these prejudices on real characters, and in natural situations. As this play is less known than some of Mr. Holcroft's other plays, we shall select the following scene for the entertainment of the reader.

“*Enter COUNT, bowing.*”

Lady Peckham. So, Sir! They tells me, Sir, that you and my foolish husband are colloguing together, for to marry my daughter! Is this troo, Sir?

Count. (*with his usual polite haughtiness*) If it were, Ma'am?

Lady P. Do you know who Miss Looey Peckham is, Sir?

Count. Not very well, Ma'am.

Lady P. Sir?

Count. Except that she is your daughter.

Lady P. And do you know who I am, Sir?

Count. I have been told, Ma'am.

Lady P. Told, Sir! Told! What have you been told? What have you been told, Sir?

Count. That your ladyship was an honest wax-chandler's daughter.

Lady P. Yes, Sir! The debbidy of his vard, Sir! A common council-man, and city sword-bearer! Had an Aldermand's gownd von year, vus chosen sheriff the next, and died a lord-mayor elect!

Count. With all his honours blooming on his brow!

Lady P. And do you know, Sir, that I designs, Sir Samooel Sheepy, Sir, an English knight and barrow knight, for the spouse of my daughter! A

gentleman, that is a gentleman! A person of honour and purtensions, and not a Papish Jesubite!

Count. Of his honours and pretensions I have yet to be informed, Madam.

Lady P. What, Sir! do you mean for to say, Sir, or to insinivate, Sir, that Sir Samooel Sheepy is not your betters?

Count. If Sir Samuel himself, Madam, had put such a question to me, I would have replied with my sword, or more properly, with my cane.

Lady P. Wery vell, Sir! I'll let Sir Samooel know that you threatens to cane him; I'll take care to report you! Cane quetha! He shall talk to you.

Count. Let him, Madam.

Lady P. Madam! Madam! At every word—Pray, Sir, do you know that Sir Paul Peckham has had the honour to be knighted by the king's own hand?

Count. I have heard as much, Madam.

Lady P. Madam, indeed!—And for you for to think for to look up to my daughter!

Count. Up, Madam!

Lady P. Yes, Sir—up, Sir!—Pray, Sir, what are your purtensions?

Count. (with great agitation) Madam!

Lady P. Who are you, Sir? Where do you come from? Who knows you? What parish do you belong to?

Count. Madam, I am of a family known to history, known to Europe, known to the whole universe!

Lady P. Ah! I believes you are better known than trusted.

Count. The names of Conolly and Villars, Madam, never before were so degraded as they have been in my person.

Lady P. Oh! I makes no doubt but you are a person that would degurade any name!

Count. Insult like what I have re-

ceived from you, Madam, no *man* should utter and escape death—But you are—

Lady P. What, Sir? What am I, Sir?

Count. A woman.

Lady P. A woman, indeed! Sir, I would have you to know as how I am a lady! A lady, Sir, of his Majesty's own making! And moreover, Sir, don't you go for to flatter yourself, that I shall bestow the hand and fortune of Miss Loocy Peckham upon any needy outlandish Count somebody nobody! My daughter, Sir, is for your betters!

Count. Madam, though scurril—
[*Recollecting himself*] I say, Madam, though such vul—, such accusations are beneath all answer, yet I must tell you that by marrying your daughter, if after this I should sink myself so low—I say, by marrying your daughter, Madam, I should confer an honour on

your family, as much superior to its expectations, as the splendour of the glorious sun is to the twinkling of the worthless glow-worm !

Lady P. What ! What ! [*Enter Edmund, son of Lady Peckham.*] Marry come up ! An Irish French foriner ! Not so good as von of our parish *porpers* ! And you ! You purtend to compare yourself to the united houses of the Peckhams and the Pringles ! Your family indeed ! Yourn ! Where's your settlement ? Yourn ! Vus'nt my great uncle, Mr. Peter Pringle, the cheëse-monger of Cateaton-street, a major in the Train Bands before you vus born, or thought of ?

Edmund [*Aside.*] So, so ! I'm too late ! [*Aloud*] Let me intreat your ladyship—

Lady P. What ! Hasn't I an ownd sister at this day married to Mr. Poladore Spraggs, the tip-toppest het-

presser in all Crutched Friars ! Isn't my maiden aunt, Miss Angelica Pringle, vorth thirty thousand pounds, in the South Sea funds, every morning she rises ! And doesn't I myself get up and go to bed, the greatest lady in this here city ! And for to purtend for to talk to me of his family ! His'n.

Edmund. The Count, Madam, is a man of the first distinction in his native country !

Lady P. What country is that, Sir ? Who ever heard of any country but England ? A Count among beggars ! How much is his Countship worth ?

Count. I had determined to be silent, Madam, but I find it impossible ! [*With vehement volubility*] And I must inform you, my family is as ancient, as exalted, and as renowned, as you have proved yours to be—what I shall not repeat ! That I am the heir to more rich acres than I believe your

Ladyship ever rode over ! That my father's vassals are more numerous than your Ladyship's vaunted guineas ! That the magnificence in which he has lived, looked with contempt on the petty, paltry strainings of a trader's pride ! And that in his hall are daily fed—
[Stops short, and betrays a consciousness of inadvertent falsehood, but suddenly continues with increasing vehemence]
 Yes, Madam, are daily fed ; now, at this moment, Madam, more faithful adherents, with their menials and followers, than all your boasted wealth could for a single year supply !

Edmund. Are ? At this moment, say you, Count ?

Count. Sir, I—I have said.

Edmund. I know you to be a man of honour, and that you cannot say what is not.

Count. I—I—I have said, Sir !
[Walking with great perturbation.]

Lady P. You have said more in a minute than you can prove in a year!

Edmund. I will pledge my word for the Count's veracity.

Count. [*Aside*] What have I done!
[*With agony*] A lie!

Lady P. As for you, Sir, I doesn't believe von vord you say! I knows the tricks of such sham chevaliers as you, too vell!

Count. [*Walking away from her*]
Torture!

Lady P. But I'll take care to have you prognosticated.

Count. [*Aside*] I can support it no longer. [*Going.*]

Edmund. [*Catching him by the hand*]
My dear Count——

Count. Sir, I am a dishonoured villain!
[*Exit.*]

Lady P. There! There! he tells you himself he is a willin? his con-

science flies in his face, and he owns it !

Edmund. [*With great ardour and feeling*] Madam, he is a noble-hearted gentleman ! His agonizing mind deems it villainy to suffer insults so gross.

[*Exit.*

Re-enter the COUNT, deep in thought, and much agitated,

Lady P. [*Seeing him*] Marry my daughter, indeed !—Faugh !

[*Exit Lady Peckham.*

Count. Into what has my impetuous anger hurried me ?—Guilty of falsehood ! I ? To recede is impossible ! What ! Stand detected before this city Madam !—whose tongue, itching with the very scrophula of pride, would iterate liar in my ear ! No ! Falsehood itself is not so foul.”—ACT III.

This is truth and nature. If it should be thought that the description of La-

dy Peckham borders too much on caricature, it should be remembered that grossness is the essence of the character, and it serves to set off more forcibly the refinement of the Count. If, however, it should be insisted that the scene which has been transcribed is a union of farce and sentimental comedy, still it is farce worthy of Foote, and the serious part is worthy of any one.

The sentiments which are inculcated in the scene which precedes the one just quoted, are such as have never been embodied with the prejudices of any class of men, because it must be confessed they are much more adapted to convince the reason than to flatter the passions or the imagination! Lucy Peckham is a female philosopher, and lectures the Count on his pretensions, in a manner scarcely less grating to his feelings, than the personalities of her mother. The Count says, "Mankind

have agreed, Madam, to honour the descendants of the wise and the brave."

To this his mistress replies, "They have so,—But you have, doubtless, too much native merit to arrogate to yourself the worth of others! You are no jay, decked in the peacock's feathers! You are not idiot enough to imagine that a skin of parchment, on which are emblazoned the arms and the acts of one wise man, with a long list of succeeding fools, is any honour to you! Responsible to mankind for the use and the abuse of such talents as you feel yourself endowed with, you ought to think only how you may deserve greatly; and disdain to be that secondary thing, that insignificant cypher, which is worthless, except from situation!"

Whatever may be thought of the political tendency of this speech, the morality of it is unquestionable; and though it may not be practicable for

society at large to act upon the standard here proposed, yet surely every individual would do well to apply it to his own conduct, and to the value which he sets upon himself in his own private esteem. However necessary it may be that the vulgar should respect rank for its own sake, it is desirable that the great themselves should respect virtue more, and endeavour to make the theory, on which nobility is founded, correspond with the practice—private worth with public esteem. The sentiments of this kind, which Mr. Holcroft has interspersed through his different works, may therefore remain as useful moral lessons: their noxious political qualities, if ever they had such, have long since evaporated; though I shall take an opportunity to shew that Mr. Holcroft's politics were never any thing more than an enlarged system of mo-

rality, growing out of just sentiments, and general improvement.

The School for Arrogance is the first of the author's pieces, in which there appeared a marked tendency to political or philosophical speculation. Sentiments of this kind, however, and at that time, would rather have increased than diminished the popularity of any piece. A proof of this is, that the very epilogue (which is seldom designed to give offence), glances that way.

"Such is the modern man of high-flown fashion!
Such are the scions sprung from Runny-Mead!
The richest soil, that bears the rankest weed!
Potatoc-like, the sprouts are worthless found;
And all that's good of them is *under ground*."

The wit and point of this satire, will not be disputed.

Mr. Holcroft's next play was *The Road to Ruin*, which carried his fame

as a dramatic writer into every corner of the kingdom, where there was a play-house. Nothing could exceed the effect produced by this play at its first appearance, nor its subsequent popularity. It not only became a universal favourite, but it deserved to be so. Mr. Holcroft, in sending round one or two copies of it to his friends before it was acted, had spoken of it as his best performance. He had hitherto been generally dissatisfied with what he had written, as not answering his own wishes, or what he thought himself capable of producing; but in this instance he seems to have thought his muse had been as favourable to him as she was likely to be. Authors are perhaps seldom deceived with respect to their works, when they judge of them from their own immediate feelings, and not out of contradiction to the opinions of others, or from

a desire to excel in something which the world thinks them incapable of. Mr. Holcroft's predictions were at least verified by the appearance of the Road to Ruin. It had a run greater than almost any other piece was ever known to have, and there is scarcely a theatre in the kingdom, except Drury-Lane, and the Haymarket, in which it has not been acted numberless times. The profits he received from it were nine hundred pounds from Mr. Harris, and three or four hundred for the copyright.

The Road to Ruin is so well known to the public, and its merits have been so fully established, that it seems almost impertinent to make any remarks upon it: yet as it is Mr. Holcroft's greatest dramatic effort, it might be thought wrong to pass it over, without attempting to point out its leading features, or

ascertain its rank among similar productions.

The character of Goldfinch, though not the principal character, was undoubtedly that which contributed most to the popularity of the piece. Nine persons out of ten who went to see the *Road to Ruin*, went for the sake of seeing Goldfinch; though the best parts of the play are those in which he has no concern. The very great effect it produced was, in some measure, owing to the inimitable acting of Lewis. But there are other circumstances which would almost be sure to make it the favourite of the public. In the first place, it is a most masterly delineation of the character it pretends to describe; namely, that of a person of very little understanding, but with very great animal spirits, in the height of youth and thoughtlessness, and who is hurried away by all the vulgar dissipation of fa-

shionable life. There is not the smallest glimmering of wit or sense in all that Goldfinch says ; yet nothing can exceed the life, the spirit, the extreme volubility, the restless animation, which Mr. Holcroft has thrown into this character. He has none but the most mean and groveling ideas ; his language consists entirely of a few cant words ; yet the rapidity with which he glances from object to object, and the evident delight which he takes in introducing his favourite phrases on all occasions, have all the effect of the most brilliant wit. *That's your sort* comes in at least fifty times, and is just as unexpected and lively the last time as the first, for no other reason than because Goldfinch has just the same pleasure in repeating it. This mechanical humour was so much the more striking in its effect, because every person could make it his own. It was a very transferable, and

therefore a very convenient, commodity. It was a compendious receipt for being witty, to go and see Goldfinch, and repeat after him, *That's your sort*. If the invention was not favourable to the increase, it was at least calculated for the spread of wit. Mr. Holcroft may in some sort be considered as the author of this species of dramatic humour, of which succeeding writers have fully availed themselves, and on which the effect of many of our most popular modern pieces depends. Cant terms have, it is true, always been the subject of ridicule on the stage; but Mr. Holcroft was, I believe, the first who made them interesting; or who conceived the project of giving spirit and animation to a character by the force of a single phrase. The two most important characters in the piece, are those of old Dornton and his son; the former, an eminent banker in the city,

the latter, a wild, but high-minded and noble-spirited young man, something like Charles, in *The School for Scandal*. The serious interest of the piece arises chiefly from the struggle between prudence and affection in the mind of the father, and from the compunction and generous sacrifices of the youth to save his father's house from the ruin which he believes he has brought upon it. He is in love with Sophia, the daughter of the widow Warren. This last lady is described with a person and mind equally unprepossessing. She is, however, supposed to be rich, and is violently in love with young Dornton, who determines, rather than see his father ruined, to marry her, and forsake his young and guileless Sophia. This match is prevented by the timely interference of old Dornton.

Mr. Sulky and Mr. Silky are two very principal characters in the play,

whose names are happily adapted to their characters; the one being as remarkable for a blunt kind of surly honesty, as the other is for smooth, sleek, fawning knavery. It is, however, on the confusion of these two names, that the contrivance of the plot depends. For the late Mr. Warren, not being well pleased with the conduct of his wife, and suspecting her violent professions of a determination not to marry again, had made a will, in which, in case such an event should happen, he had left his property to his natural son, Milford, and to his wife's daughter, appointing Mr. Sulky his executor. He died abroad; and the person who brought over the will, being deceived by the name, leaves it in the possession of Mr. Silky, instead of Mr. Sulky. Mr. Silky, knowing the widow's amorous propensities, and willing to profit by them, informs Goldfinch,

who is besieging her for her money, that he has a deed in his possession which puts the widow's fortune, should she marry again, entirely in his power; and exacts a promise from him of fifty thousand pounds out of a hundred and fifty, as the price of secrecy, with respect to himself. He then calls on the widow, shews her the conditions of the will, and threatens to make it public unless she marries Goldfinch, and assents to his proposal. She, however, governed by her passion for young Dornton, and relying on the exhaustless wealth of his family, sets Mr. Silky and his secret at defiance; and on his next visit, treats Mr. Goldfinch with very little ceremony. But after she finds herself disappointed of Dornton, and is in the height of her exclamations against the whole sex, Goldfinch is announced. His name at this moment has the effect of suddenly calming her

spirits ; he is admitted ; received with much affected modesty : he makes another offer ; the bargain is struck ; Mr. Silky is sent for, and Goldfinch sets off post haste for a license. But just as he is going out, he meets Milford ; and being more fool than knave, he tells the latter of his marriage, and of the hush-money to Silky, on account of some deed, by which he has the widow's fortune at his command, though he does not know how. This excites suspicion in the mind of Milford, who, supposing it must be his father's will, goes immediately to Sulky to inform him of the circumstance, and they conceal themselves in the widow's apartment. Goldfinch, Silky, and the widow, soon after come in ; every thing is settled ; and the will is on the point of being committed to the flames, when Milford and Sulky burst upon them,

and their whole scheme is unluckily defeated.

This sketch may be sufficient to give an idea of the bustle of the scene, and the rapidity with which events follow one another. The story never stagnates for a moment; the whole is full, crowded, and the wonder seems to be how so many incidents, so regularly connected, and so clearly explained, can be brought together in so small a compass. At the same time, the hurry of events, and the intricacy of the plot, do not interfere with the unfolding of the characters, or the forcible expression of the passions. Some of the scenes are replete with the truest pathos, which is expressed without exaggeration, or the least appearance of art. Though the feelings of paternal affection, of terror, generosity, &c. are often wrought up to the highest pitch,

and described with their full force, so that the reader finds nothing wanting; yet it is in language so easy and natural, that not only might it be uttered by the persons themselves, but they could scarcely use any other.

Mrs. Holcroft died in the year 1790.

It was in the preceding year that Mr. Holcroft met with the severest blow that fortune had yet inflicted on him, the death of his son. This unhappy event has been sometimes misrepresented by persons unacquainted with the character and feelings of Mr. Holcroft: the best answer to these misrepresentations will be to state the circumstances as they happened, without any other comment.

William Holcroft was his only son, and favourite child, and this very circumstance perhaps led to the catastrophe, which had nearly proved fatal to his father as well as to himself. He had been brought up, if any thing, with too much care and tenderness.

The greatest attention had been paid to his education from the very first, not only by teaching him to read and write, French, English, &c., but by daily instilling such moral principles into his mind, as it was Mr. Holcroft's earnest wish, and firm belief, would in the end make him a great and good man. Perhaps it was a mistake to suppose that precept could anticipate the fruits of experience, or that it was not a dangerous experiment to enable a child to think and reason for himself on the propriety of his own actions, before settled habits and a knowledge of consequences had provided a sufficient counterpoise to the levity of youth, and the caprices of fancy. Be this as it may, he was a boy of extraordinary capacity, and Mr. Holcroft thought no pains should be spared for his instruction and improvement. From the first, however, he had shewn an unsettled disposition, and his propensity to ramble was such from his childhood, that when he was only

four years old, and under the care of an aunt at Nottingham, he wandered away to a place at some distance, where there was a coffee-house, into which he went, and read the newspapers to the company, by whom he was taken care of, and sent home. This propensity was so strong in him, that it became habitual, and he had run away six or seven times before the last. Once, for instance, in 1786, when he was about thirteen, he had taken a little mare which belonged to his father, and went to Northampton, where he was discovered by some respectable persons in the place, and word being sent to Mr. Holcroft, he went down, and brought him home with him. On Sunday, November 8th, 1789, he brought his father a short poem; a watch which had been promised as a reward, was given him; his father conversed with him in the most affectionate manner, praised, encouraged, and told him, that notwithstanding his former

errors and wanderings, he was convinced he would become a good and excellent man. But he observed, when taking him by the hand to express his kindness, that the hand of the youth, instead of returning the pressure as usual, remained cold and insensible. This however at the moment was supposed to be accidental. He seemed unembarrassed, cheerful, and asked leave, without any appearance of design or hesitation, to dine with a friend in the city, which was immediately granted. He thanked his father, went down stairs, and several times anxiously inquired whether his father were gone to dress. As soon as he was told that he had left his room, he went up stairs again, broke open a drawer, and took out forty pounds. With this, the watch, a pocket-book, and a pair of pistols of his father's, he hastened away to join one of his acquaintance, who was going to the West-Indies. The name of this young person was G—.

He was immediately pursued to Gravesend, but ineffectually. It was not discovered till the following Wednesday; that he had taken the money. After several days of the most distressing inquietude, there appeared strong presumptive proofs that he, with his acquaintance, was on board the *Fame*, Captain Carr, then lying in the Downs. The father and a friend immediately set off, and travelled post all Sunday night to Deal. Their information proved true, for he was found to be on board the *Fame*, where he assumed a false name, though his true situation was known to the Captain. He had spent all the money, except 15*l.*, in paying for his passage, and purchasing what he thought he wanted. He had declared he would shoot any person who came to take him, but that if his father came, he would shoot himself. His youth, for he was but sixteen, made the threat appear incredible. The pistols, pocket-book, and remaining money,

were locked up in safety for him, by his acquaintance. But he had another pair of pistols concealed. Mr. Holcroft and his friend went on board, made inquiries, and understood he was there. He had retired into a dark part of the steerage. When he was called and did not answer, a light was sent for, and as he heard the ship's steward, some of the sailors, and his father, approaching, conscious of what he had done, and unable to bear the presence of his father, and the open shame of detection, he suddenly put an end to his existence.

The shock which Mr. Holcroft received was almost mortal. For three days he could not see his own family, and nothing but the love he bore that family could probably have prevented him from sinking under his affliction. He seldom went out of his house for a whole year afterwards: and the impression was never completely effaced from his mind.

BOOK IV.

CHAP. I.

MR. HOLCROFT had been, for some years, imbibing principles, and forming a system in his mind, relative to political and moral questions, considerably different from those which are generally received, or at least acted upon by the world.

The interest which he felt in the success of these speculations, will be best expressed by extracting some part of a letter to a friend, written in February, 1790. He says, “ The great object I have in view, is not the obtaining of riches, but the power of employing my

time according to the bent of my genius, in the performance of some works which shall remain when I am no more—works that will promote the general good. This is a purpose I have so strongly at heart, that I would with pleasure sacrifice ease, peace, health, and life for its accomplishment: nay, accomplish it I will, unless cut off in the midst of my labours. It has been my pursuit for years, and you are my witness, I have never relaxed, never been discouraged by disappointment, to which indeed I hold men of real strength of mind to be superior.” A clearer picture cannot be given of the motives from which the writer appears to have engaged in and prosecuted his task—the regard of good men hereafter, and a wish to promote the general welfare of mankind, by diffusing a system of more just and enlightened principles of action.

These rational and worthy motives are those which actuated Mr. Holcroft's whole conduct in the part he took in such questions: they are the only ones which he had at heart, and he never seems in a single instance to have wavered in his pursuit, by flattering the prejudices, or soothing the vices of any set of men, by cajoling or inflaming the multitude, or by adapting his views or language to those of the ignorant, the rash, or profligate. He was a man of too honest, and of too independent a turn of mind to be a time-server, to lend himself as a tool to the violence of any party; his habits and studies rendered him equally averse to political intrigues or popular tumults; and he had no other desire than to speak the truth, such as he saw it, with a conviction that its effects must be beneficial to society. Whether his opinions were right or wrong, is another

question: I speak here of his intentions. But I am anticipating the subject; and also deviating from my plan, which was not to write a panegyric, but a history.

Anna St. Ives, a novel in 7 vols. appeared in 1792. It was much read at the time, and excited considerable attention, both from the force with which it is written, and from the singularity of the characters and sentiments. As a mere novel, it is interesting, lively, and vigorous. The natural or real characters it contains, are exhibited with great truth of conception, with strong and vivid colouring, and often with a great deal of whimsical eccentricity. The characters both of the proud, daring, impetuous, revengeful, capricious Coke Clifton, and of the sly, selfish, insinuating, cool, plodding, immovable Abimelech Henley, are master-pieces. The invention of either of these characters

would stamp the author a man of genius. With respect to the first, however spirited the execution, the invention is beyond all doubt due to Richardson: Coke Clifton and Lovelace are the same being, and in fact are often placed in situations so similar, that the resemblance must strike the most cursory reader. Notwithstanding this, too much praise can hardly be given to Mr. Holcroft for the life, the enthusiasm, and glowing fancy with which he has sustained this character, and applied it to a different purpose. As to Abimelech, he is all his own; and he is a person of such quaint and ill-sorted qualities, his humility and his insolence are so oddly jumbled together, his knavery is so artfully disguised, and yet so easily seen through, and he delivers all his purposes in such a strange jargon of cant terms and phrases, every one of which has some end, though

their connexion is scarcely intelligible; in short there is such a perfect consistence given to the most crude and shapeless mass, and this in a manner so unlike any thing else, that it seems almost equal to the invention of a new language. That class of men who get introduced into gentlemen's families; and who, by plodding, hoarding, fawning, and flattering the follies of their masters, make fortunes themselves, ruin, and then trample upon their employers, were never better represented than in the person of Mr. Abimelech Henley. The steward in Castle Rackrent is not so very a knave by half.—The character of the Count de Beau-noir, though short, is managed with a great deal of humour and feeling. Mac Fane, the keeper of the mad-house, &c. are strong and real portraits.

But the principal characters in the novel, (at least those which were in-

tended by the author to be the most prominent,) are not natural, but ideal beings. In fact, they are not so properly characters (that is, distinct individuals) as the vehicles of certain general sentiments, or machines put into action, as an experiment to shew how these general principles would operate in particular situations. Frank Henley, and Anna St. Ives, are the philosophical hero and heroine of the work. They are the organs through which the voice of truth and reason is to breathe, and whose every action is to be inspired by the pure love of justice.—Mr. Holcroft, by embodying his general principles in individual characters, no doubt, gained some advantages, which he could not otherwise have done; such as shewing the possibility of his plan, by actually reducing it to practice, and also pointing out how persons convinced of the truths he wishes to

impress, both may and ought to act in the present state of society. For instance, duelling is held to be criminal; and to shew that declining a duel is no proof of cowardice, Frank Henley, who receives a blow from Coke Clifton, will not fight with him, but the very next day leaps into the water after him, and saves his life at the imminent hazard of his own: thus by an act of true heroism rising superior to the prejudices of false honour.

But though the author has gained in point of argument by throwing his reasonings into a narrative form, perhaps he has lost in point of the general impression produced upon the mind. It was Mr. Holcroft's business to make his characters not only consistent, but interesting and amiable: and he has done nearly all that was possible to accomplish this end. But it seems as if the difficulty of the undertaking, from

the very nature of it, was too great to be overcome. . For in spite of all the appeals that are made to reason, and though we strive ever so much to suspend our invidious prepossessions, yet the old adage of " A faultless monster, which the world ne'er saw," continually obtrudes itself upon us, and poisons our satisfaction. It is true, our dislike may be irrational, but still it is dislike. That which, if left in generals, we might believe and admire, if brought to a nearer view, and exhibited in all its circumstances of improbability, we begin to distrust, and for that reason to hate: *quod sic mihi ostendis, incredulus odi*. Perfect virtue, the pure disinterested love of justice, an unshaken zeal for truth, regardless of all petty consequences, a superiority to false modesty, a contempt for the opinion of the world, when reason and conscience are on our side, all these are fine

things, and easily conceived, while they remain, what they are, the pure creatures of the understanding, mere abstract essences, which cannot kindle too warm a glow of enthusiasm in the breast. But when these airy nothings are made reluctantly to assume a local habitation and a name, called Frank, or Anna; when they are personified in the son of a knavish steward, or the daughter of a foolish baronet; when they are petticoated, booted and spurred; when they are mounted on horseback, or seat themselves in a post-chaise, or walk arm in arm through the streets of London, or Paris,—the naked form of truth vanishes under all this pitiful drapery, and the mind is distracted with mean and contradictory appearances which it knows not how to reconcile. When familiarised to us by being brought on the real stage of life, and ascribed to any supposed characters,

perfect virtue becomes little better than a cheat, and the pretension to superior wisdom, looks like affectation, conceit, and pedantry. This effect must in some measure take place, even though the most perfect consistency and propriety were preserved: how much more then when the mind eagerly catches hold of every little flaw, to prove that the whole is a piece of acting, and to revert to its habitual feelings of nature and probability?—It is not difficult to personify the passions, so as to render them natural: that is a language which men readily understand. But of the difficulty of exhibiting the passions entirely under the control of reason, of virtue, religion, or any other abstract principle, let those judge who have studied the romances of Richardson. To have made *Clarissa* a natural character with all her studied attention to prudence, propriety, &c. is the

greatest proof of his genius: yet even she is not free from affectation. In Sir Charles Grandison, he has completely failed: he has exhibited him either as an automaton, a puppet, or a self-complacent coxcomb, "ugly all over with affectation," whose own perfection, propriety of conduct, and fine qualities, are never for a moment out of his sight. Rousseau's Julia, again, is something of a pedant, and cold, calculating, and insincere. I mention these instances to shew, that though I do not think Mr. Holcroft has rendered his hero and heroine so attractive as he himself probably thought they might be made, yet it was not for want of genius, but from the impossibility of the undertaking. Frank Henley, though a much nobler-minded being than Sir Charles Grandison, yet stands in general in the same predicament. We admire his actions, but we do not love the

man : his motives we respect, but with his feelings we have little sympathy. Indeed he is a character who does not stand in need of our sympathy ; “ A reasoning, self-sufficient thing, an intellectual all in all.” He is himself a being without passions ; and in order to feel with him, we must ourselves be divested of passion.

I have made these remarks to shew the difficulty of embodying a philosophic character in a dramatic form.

The dignity of truth is in some measure necessarily lowered by coming to us “ in so questionable a shape,” and nothing but a very powerful mind can prevent it from becoming quite ridiculous and contemptible. Mr. Holcroft himself was perfectly aware of the prejudices he had to encounter, in order to exhibit his characters, so as not to be misunderstood. He has not indeed been sparing of the most point-

ed raillery upon the philosophic pretensions of Frank Henley, in the letters of his rival, Coke Clifton. And the best proof of the strength with which he has conceived, and pourtrayed his favourite character is, that notwithstanding all the other's wit and eloquence. Frank is never once degraded in our esteem. He stands his ground firmly, and, upon the whole, has the preference, though it is not exactly such a preference as virtue ought to have over vice, wisdom over folly, or pure mind over sensuality and selfishness. An extract from one of Clifton's letters, in which he describes Frank Henley, will give a tolerable idea of the characters of both.

“ The youth has some parts, some ideas : at least he has plenty of words. But his arrogance is insufferable. He does not scruple to interfere in the discourse, either with me, Sir Arthur, or

the angelic Anna! Nay sets up for a reformer; and pretends to an insolent superiority of understanding and wisdom. Yet he was never so long from home before in his life; has seen nothing, but has read a few books, and has been permitted to converse with this all-intelligent deity.

“ I cannot deny but that the pedagogue sometimes surprises me with the novelty of his opinions; but they are extravagant. I have condescended oftener than became me, to shew how full of hyperbole and paradox they were. Still he has constantly maintained them, with a kind of congruity that astonished me, and even rendered many of them plausible.

“ But, exclusive of his obstinacy, the rude, pot-companion loquacity of the fellow is highly offensive. He has no sense of inferiority. He stands as erect, and speaks with as little embar-

rassment, and as loudly as the best of us; nay, boldly asserts, that neither riches, rank, nor birth have any claim. I have offered to buy him a beard, if he would but turn heathen philosopher. I have several times indeed bestowed no small portion of ridicule upon him; but in vain. His retorts are always ready; and his intrepidity, in this kind of impertinence, is unexampled.

“From some anecdotes which are told of him, I find he is not without personal courage: but he has no claim to chastisement from a gentleman. Petty insults he disregards; and has several times put me almost beyond my forbearance by his cool and cutting replies. His oratory is always ready; cut, dry, and fit for use; and d——d insolent oratory it frequently is.

“The absurdity of his tenets, can only be equalled by the effrontery with which they are maintained. Among

the most ridiculous of what he calls first principles is that of the equality of mankind. He is one of your level-ers! Marry! His superior! Who is he? On what proud eminence can he be found? On some Welsh mountain, or the peak of Teneriffe? Certainly not in any of the nether regions? Dispute his prerogative who dare! He derives from Adam; what time the world was all "hail fellow well met!" The savage, the wild man of the woods, is his true liberty-boy; and the ourang-outang, his first cousin. A lord is a merry andrew, a duke a jack-pudding, and a king a tom-fool: his name is man!

"Then, as to property, 'tis a tragic farce; 'tis his sovereign pleasure to eat nectarines, grow them who will. Another Alexander he; the world is all his own! Aye, and he will govern it as he best knows how. He will legislate, dictate, dogmatise, for who so infal-

lible? Cannot Goliah crack a walnut ?

“ As for arguments, it is but ask and have: a peck at a bidding, and a good double handful over. I own I thought I knew something; but no, I must to my horn-book. Then, for a simile, it is sacrilege; and must be kicked out of the high court of logic! Sarcasm too is an ignoramus, and cannot solve a problem; wit a pert puppy, who can only flash and bounce. The heavy walls of wisdom are not to be battered down with such popguns and pellets. He will waste you wind enough to set up twenty millers, in proving an apple is not an egg-shell; and that *homo* is Greek for a goose. Duns Scotus was a school-boy to him. I confess he has more than once dumb-founded me with his subtleties. But, pshaw! it is a mortal waste of words and time to bestow them on him.”—Vol. ii.

With respect to Mr. Holcroft's prin-

ciples as they are delivered in Anna St. Ives, I shall here attempt to give a short sketch of them, of the train of events in which they originated, and of the seductiveness of the prospects which they held out to a mind not perfectly callous to the interests of humanity. Even could it be shewn that they were disgraceful to his penetration, yet they were certainly honourable to his heart, and they were highly honourable to human nature. It is indeed a little singular, that those who have augured most highly of the powers of our nature, and have entertained the most sanguine hopes of the future virtue and happiness of man, should so often have been considered as the worst enemies of society. But it seems that our self-love is not so much flattered by the idea of the progress we might hereafter make, as offended by that of the little we have already made.

Reformers imprudently compliment mankind on what they might become, at the expense of what they are.

Mr. Holcroft was a purely speculative politician. He constantly deprecated force, rashness, tumult, and popular violence. He was a friend to political and moral improvement, but he wished it to be gradual, calm, and rational, because he believed no other could be effectual. All sanguinary measures, all party virulence, all provocation and invective he deplored: all that he wished was the free and dispassionate discussion of the great principles relating to human happiness, trusting to the power of reason to make itself heard, and not doubting but that the result would be favourable to freedom and virtue. He believed that truth had a natural superiority over error, if it could only be heard; that if once discovered, it must, being

left to itself, soon spread and triumph ; and that the art of printing would not only accelerate this effect, but would prevent those accidents, which had rendered the moral and intellectual progress of mankind hitherto so slow, irregular, and uncertain. .

This opinion of the progress of truth, and its power to crush error, had been gaining ground in this country ever since the Reformation ; the immense improvements in natural and mechanical knowledge within the last century had made it appear nearly impossible to limit the discoveries of art and science ; as great a revolution (and it was generally supposed as great improvements) had taken place in the theory of the human mind in consequence of the publication of Mr. Locke's Essay ; and men's attention having been lately forcibly called to many of the evils and abuses existing

in society, it seemed as if the present was the era of moral and political improvement, and that as bold discoveries and as large advances towards perfection would shortly be made in these, as had been already made in other subjects. That this inference was profound or just, I do not affirm: but it was natural, and strengthened not only by the hopes of the good, but by the sentiments of the most thinking men.

As far as any practical experiment had been tried, the result was not discouraging. Of two revolutions that had taken place, one, that of America, had succeeded, and a more free and equal government had been established without tumult, civil discord, animosity or bloodshed, except what had arisen from the interference of the mother country. The other Revolution, that of France, was but begun: but it

had at this time displayed none of those alarming features which it afterwards discovered. Whether the difference of the result in the latter case was owing to the external situation of the country, which exposed it to the inroads of a band of despots; or to the manners of the people, which had been depraved by a long course of slavery, which while it made freedom the more desirable, rendered them the more incapable of it; whether, I say, the French Revolution might not have succeeded, had not every means been employed to destroy and crush the good that might have been expected from it, is a question not to be discussed here: but at the period of which I am speaking, I believe I may say there were few real friends of liberty who did not augur well of it. A tyranny, which all our most esteemed writers had been endeavouring for the last hundred years to render odious

and contemptible to the English people, had been overthrown; and this was hailed by all those who had been taught to value the principles of liberty, or the welfare of nations, as an event auspicious to France and to the world. The emancipation of thirty millions of people (so I remember it was considered at the time) was a change for the better, as great as it was unexpected: the pillars of oppression and tyranny seemed to have been overthrown: man was about to shake off the fetters which had bound him in wretchedness and ignorance; and the blessings that were yet in store for him were unforeseen and incalculable. Hope smiled upon him, and pointed to futurity.

With these feelings, and with these encouragements from the state of the public mind, reasoning men began to inquire what would be the ruling principles of action in a state of society, a

perfect as we can suppose, or the general diffusion of which would soonest lead to such a state of improvement. And the answer was found, not so much in any real novelties, or heretofore unheard-of paradoxes, as in the most pure and simple principles of morality, differing from the common and received ones, no otherwise than in the severity with which they are insisted on, and in their application to a state of things in which the same indulgences, precautions, and modifications of our higher and paramount obligations, which are at present inseparable from the imperfection of our nature, would no longer be necessary. The whole of the *modern* philosophy (as far as relates to moral conduct), is nothing more than a literal, rigid, unaccommodating, and systematic interpretation of the text, (which is itself pretty old and good authority) "Thou shalt love

thy neighbour as thyself," without making any allowances for the weaknesses of mankind, or the degree to which this rule was practicable; and the answer to the question, "Who is our neighbour," is the same, both in the sacred records, and in the modern paraphrase, "He who most wants our assistance." I have mentioned this coincidence (I hope without offence), to shew that the shock occasioned by the extreme and naked manner of representing the doctrine of universal benevolence, did not, and could not, arise from the principle itself, but from the supposition that this comprehensive and sublime principle was of itself sufficient to regulate the actions of men, without the aid of those common affections, and mixed motives, which our habits, passions, and vices, had taught us to regard as the highest practicable point of virtue. If, however, it be granted,

not only that it is in itself *right* and *best*, but that a period might come, in which it would be *possible* for men to be actuated by the sole principles of truth and justice, then it would seem to follow that the subordinate and auxiliary rules of action might be dispensed with, being superseded by the sense of higher and more important duties.

Mr. Holcroft was among the foremost and most ardent of those who indulged their imaginations, in contemplating such an Utopian, or ideal state of society, and in reasoning on the manner in which the great leading principle of morality would then be reduced to practice. In such a state of things, he believed that wars, bloodshed, and national animosities, would cease; that peace and good-will would reign among men; and that the feeling of patriotism, necessary as it now is to preserve the independence of states,

and repel the ravages of unprincipled and ambitious invaders, would die away of itself with national jealousies and antipathies, with ambition, war, and foreign conquest. Family attachments would also be weakened or lost in the general principle of benevolence, when every man would be a brother. Exclusive friendships could no longer be formed, because they would interfere with the true claims of justice and humanity, and because it would be no longer necessary to keep alive the stream of the affections, by confining them to a particular channel, when they would be continually refreshed, invigorated, and would overflow with the diffusive soul of mutual philanthropy, and generous, undivided sympathy with all men. Another feeling, no less necessary at present, would then be forgotten, namely, gratitude to benefactors; but not from a selfish,

hateful spirit, or hardened insensibility to kind offices; but because all men would in fact be equally ready to promote one another's welfare, that is, equally benefactors and friends to each other, without the motives either of gratitude or self-interest. Promises, in like manner, would no longer be binding, or necessary: not in order that men might take advantage of this liberty to consult their own whims or convenience, and trick one another, but that by being free from every inferior obligation, they might be enabled more steadily and directly to pursue the simple dictates of reason and conscience. False honour, false shame, vanity, emulation, &c. would upon the same principle give way to other and better motives. It is evident that laws and punishments would cease with the cause that produces them, the commission of crimes. Neither would the distinctions

of property subsist in a society, where the interests and feelings of all would be more intimately blended than they are at present among members of the same family, or among the dearest friends. Neither the allurements of ease, or wealth, nor the dread of punishment, would be required to excite to industry, or to prevent fraud and violence, in a state (such as has been supposed), where all would cheerfully labour for the good of all; and where the most refined reason, and inflexible justice actuating a whole community, could scarcely fail to ensure the same effects which at present result from the motives of honesty and honour. The labour, therefore, requisite to produce the necessaries of life, would be equally divided among the members of such a community, and the remainder of their time would be spent in the pursuit of science, in the cultivation of the noblest arts, and in the most

refined social and intellectual enjoyments.

However wild and visionary this scheme may appear, it is certain that its greatest fault is in expecting higher things of human nature than it seems at present capable of, and in exacting such a divine or angelic degree of virtue and wisdom, before it can be put in practice, as without a miracle in its favour must for ever prevent its becoming any thing more than a harmless dream, a sport of the imagination, or "an exercise in the schools." But to consider a man as an immoral character, or a political delinquent, for having indulged in such speculations, is no less false or absurd, than to stigmatise any one as a bad member of the community for having written a treatise on the Millennium. Yet with respect to Mr. Holcroft, this appears to have been "the very head and front of his offending."

CHAP. II.

THE first part of Hugh Trevor, a novel, appeared in 1794, and the remainder in 1797. This novel is a work of less genius than Anna St. Ives, but it is characterised by much sound sense, by a clear and vigorous style, by acute observation, and by many satirical, but accurate portraits of modern manners. As a political work, it may be considered as a sequel to Anna St. Ives; for as that is intended to develop certain general principles by exhibiting imaginary characters, so the latter has a tendency to enforce the same conclusions, by depicting the vices and distresses, which are generated by the existing institutions of society. A Lord and a Bishop are among the most pro-

minent figures. That such characters exist in fact, there cannot be a doubt; that the satire is applied in too general and unqualified a manner, is an objection which may also be readily admitted; but it certainly is not necessary, in order to enforce the *imperfection* of existing institutions and manners, that the profligacy which he has ascribed to these characters should be universal. A very little of it is enough, and too much—were there any real and substantial remedy for the evil.

The story of Hugh Trevor is less connected and interesting than that of Anna St. Ives: the excellence of the work is to be judged of from detached scenes and passages, rather than from considering it as a whole. Among the most striking passages are the description of Oxford, Wakefield's conversations with Hugh Trevor, the disputes with Trotman on the study of the law,

the character of Olivia's aunt, which is in the best style of the old novels, the scene in the stage-coach between the aunt, Olivia, and Hugh Trevor, the description given by Glibly of the characters at the playhouse, and some of the scenes which occur in the history of Wilmot. The dialogues in Hugh Trevor are almost all of them highly spirited, and full of character, and the language exactly that of animated conversation. Mr. Holcroft would (as it might be expected,) have an advantage in this respect over novel-writers in general, from his habit of writing for the stage. Perhaps the finest things in Hugh Trevor, are, the account of an author, found in Wilmot's pocket, after he had attempted to drown himself, and the song of Gaffer Gray. Both these I shall extract, as they are short and detached, and, in my opinion at least, exquisite pieces of writing.

The paper found in Wilmot's pocket, after the rash, and almost fatal, act, to which he has been driven by repeated disappointment, and extreme distress, is as follows.

“This body, if ever it should be found, was once a thing, which, by way of reproach among men, was called an author. It moved about the earth despised and unnoticed; and died indigent and unlamented. It could hear, see, feel, smell, and taste, with as much quickness, delicacy, and force, as other bodies. It had desires and passions like other bodies, but was denied the use of them by such as had the power and the will to engross the good things of this world to themselves. The doors of the great were shut upon it; not because it was infected with disease, or contaminated with infamy; but on account of the fashion of the garments with which it was clothed, and the

name it derived from its forefathers; and because it had not the habit of bending its knee where its heart owed no respect, nor the power of moving its tongue to gloze the crimes, or flatter the follies of men. - It was excluded the fellowship of such as heap up gold and silver; not because it did, but for fear it might, ask a small portion of their beloved wealth. It shrunk with pain and pity from the haunts of ignorance, which the knowledge it possessed could not enlighten, and from guilt, that its sensations were obliged to abhor. There was but one class of men with whom it was permitted to associate, and those were such as had feelings and misfortunes like its own, among whom it was its hard fate frequently to suffer imposition, from assumed worth and fictitious distress. Beings of supposed benevolence, capable of perceiving, loving, and promoting merit and

virtue, have now and then seemed to flit and glide before it. But the visions were deceitful. Ere they were distinctly seen, the phantoms vanished. Or, if such beings do exist, it has experienced the peculiar hardship of never having met with any, in whom both the purpose and the power were fully united. Therefore, with hands wearied with labour, eyes dim with watchfulness, veins but half nourished, and a mind at length subdued by intense study, and a reiteration of unaccomplished hopes, it was driven by irresistible impulse to end at once such a complication of evils. The knowledge was imposed upon it that, amid all these calamities, it had one consolation—Its miseries were not eternal—That itself had the power to end them. This power it has employed, because it found itself incapable of supporting any longer the wretchedness of its own situ-

ation, and the blindness and injustice of mankind: and as, while it lived, it lived scorned and neglected, so it now commits itself to the waves; in expectation, after it is dead, of being mangled, belied, and insulted."

The song of Gaffar-Gray is written in a less sombrous style, with a mixture of banter and irony. But it is distinguished by the same fulness of feeling, and the same simple, forcible, and perfect expression of it. There is nothing wanting, and nothing superfluous. The author has produced exactly the impression he intended.

" Ho! Why dost thou shiver and shake,
 Gaffar-Gray!
 And why doth thy nose look so blue?
 ' 'Tis the weather that's cold,
 ' 'Tis I'm grown very old,
 ' And my doublet is not very new,
 ' Well-a-day !"

Then, line thy worn doublet with ale,
 Gaffar-Gray ;
 And warm thy old heart with a glass.
 ‘ Nay, but credit I’ve none ;
 ‘ And my money’s all gone ;
 ‘ Then say how may that come to pass ?
 ‘ Well-a-day !’

Hie away to the house on the brow,
 Gaffar-Gray ;
 And knock at the jolly priest’s door.
 ‘ The priest often preaches
 ‘ Against worldly riches ;
 ‘ But ne’er gives a mite to the poor,
 ‘ Well-a-day !’

The lawyer lives under the hill,
 Gaffar-Gray ;
 Warmly fenc’d both in back and in front.
 ‘ He will fasten his locks,
 ‘ And will threaten the stocks,
 ‘ Should he ever more find me in want,
 ‘ Well-a-day !’

The ‘Squire has fat beeves and brown ale,
 Gaffar-Gray ;
 And the season will welcome you there.

' His fat beeves and his beer,
 ' And his merry new year
 ' Are all for the flush and the fair,
 ' Well-a-day !'

My keg is but low, I confess,
 Gaffar-Gray;
 What then ? While it lasts, man, we'll live.
 ' The poor man alone,
 ' When he hears the poor moan,
 ' Of his morsel a morsel will give,
 ' Well-a-day !'

CHAP. III.

WE have hitherto beheld Mr. Hol-
 croft only in the light of an author, or
 as a private man : we have at present to
 consider him in that part of his history,
 which was the most interesting to the
 public, and the most honourable to
 himself, of any of the circumstances of

his life ;—his behaviour under that most unaccountable, unjust, and groundless prosecution, which was instituted against him for high-treason, in the year 1794. The account of this transaction will be given nearly literally from Mr. Holcroft's own " Narrative of Facts," published soon after. I shall only observe of this work, which is written in a style of manly and nervous eloquence, that it not only contains the most undeniable proofs of the author's innocence of the charge brought against him, and of the knowledge which the prosecutors themselves had of his innocence, but that it farther shews Mr. Holcroft's character in a most amiable and respectable point of view. His regard to his family and friends, the steady uprightness of his mind, his ardent love of liberty, his utter abhorrence of all violent and san-

guinary measures, and the sincerity, and even enthusiasm with which he acted up to the principles he professed, are evident in every line of his narrative.

It was in the month of November, 1792, that he first became a member of the Society for constitutional information. The multitude of extraordinary events which at that period happened in France, excited people of all ranks to political inquiry; and men were roused to a conviction, which, though obvious, yet seemed a recent discovery, that the political institutions of all nations essentially influence the morals and happiness of the people, and that these institutions are capable of improvement. The good was no sooner conceived than an eagerness to enjoy it was begotten; and this eagerness was frequently so impatient, as to

excite a dread, that even if it did not defeat, it might lamentably retard its own purpose.

At length, the apprehensions of those, who thought it their interest to prevent any kind of change, were awakened. Their numbers considerable, their wealth immense, their influence universal, their prejudices strong, and their appetites and passions almost their only means of enjoyment, they no sooner saw danger, than they conceived disgust for the supposed authors of it: and this disgust rapidly quickened into hatred. Animosity once conceived is generally mutual; and the passions of both parties seemed every day to become more and more inflamed, and to be pregnant with pernicious consequences.

Under such circumstances, it became (in Mr. Holcroft's opinion) the duty of every man to think seriously,

and act with vigour. Passengers in a storm labour at the pump, are upbraided if they linger, and in danger of being thrown overboard. Individual and general safety are the same ; and the man who is not trusted with the helm, may yet aid to heave the lead, or cast the anchor.

Mr. Holcroft, believing that all men, and all actions contribute more or less to the general good, had long been accustoming himself to keep that good in view. Stimulated by the considerations just mentioned, and by the events that pressed with daily astonishment on the mind ; he ardently applied himself to the study of man, and the means of promoting his welfare, and lessening the evils that result from his present vices and imperfections. The chief of the principles, to which this inquiry led, were that man is happy, in proportion as he is truly informed ; that

his ignorance, which is the parent of his misery and vices; is not a fault, but a misfortune, which can only be remedied by infusing juster principles, and more enlightened notions into his mind; that punishment, violence, and rancour, only tend to inflame the passions, and perpetuate the mistakes they are meant to cure; and that therefore, the best and only effectual means of ameliorating the condition of mankind, is by the gentleness of instruction, by steady inquiry, and by a calm, but dauntless reliance on the progressive power of truth.

These principles being firmly rooted in his mind, Mr. Holcroft naturally became the opponent of all violence, and a determined friend to the publication of truth; since by that alone, he thought the well-being of mankind could be promoted. With respect to the Society for constitutional informa-

tion, of which he had become a member, he did not approve of many of their proceedings, nor was he altogether satisfied with the authority they seemed to assume of peremptorily deciding questions by a majority of votes, which he thought could only be decided by reason : but still he conceived that this was not a sufficient ground to absent himself from their meetings, as such an over-scrupulousness would exclude all those who were best calculated to prevent such societies, in their too great ardour to do good, from doing ill ; since if he refused to act with men as long as they were guilty of mistake, he must banish himself wholly from their intercourse.

He entered this Society then with a firm determination to use every endeavour to prevent violence and acrimony, to communicate the truth he knew, or imagined he knew, and to stimulate

others to do the same. Accordingly, while he remained a member of it, he never interfered with the framing of a single resolution: when questions were put, he sometimes voted; and sometimes spoke to declare his opinion, but was much oftener silent; either because he thought them frivolous, or such a mixture of right and wrong, as to leave him undecided. He little imagined that it would be possible to accuse their insignificant proceedings as treasonable: much less that he should be selected as one of the most wicked of the conspirators.

The apprehensions of ministry had been first publicly announced in the proclamation of the 21st of May, 1792: and the coercive measures on which they had determined, immediately appeared in parliamentary addresses, and the measures of the magistrates and

municipal officers, throughout the kingdom. Associations were formed, and the danger of the constitution, from the wicked attempts of republicans and levellers, became the cry of what was called the aristocratic party. So active were these self-declared friends of government, and so loud in their asseverations of approaching ruin, the destruction of property, insurrection, and anarchy, that quiet people began to partake of the fears of these agitators; and ministry, by more proclamations, asserted that insurrections did actually exist, which the militia was called out to quell, when not a hand or foot was stirring on any such pretences within the confines of Great-Britain. Men even of respectable characters and honest intentions now thought it an heroic act of duty, to watch the conduct of their intimate friends, excite them to utter violent or seditious ex-

pressions, and afterwards to turn informers against the intemperance they had provoked. To avoid giving any opinion was impossible. Language the most outrageous, was employed to make those who were in the least suspected declare their creed; and if it were not entirely accommodating, the peaceable citizen, after being entrapped, was insulted, and turned, or frequently kicked, out of tap-rooms, coffee-houses, and public places. The impotence of the obnoxious party was every where demonstrated; yet the outcry of alarm increased. Church-and-king-mobs were proved, in courts of justice, to have been encouraged by the very men whose office it was to keep the peace: while no insurrection, or shade of insurrection, appeared on the part of the people, wishing for reform. In the same spirit, printers and booksellers all over the kingdom

were hunted out for prosecution; and the tempest of insurrection and anarchy was so confidently affirmed to be rising and raging, that the House of Commons voted the suspension of the Habeas Corpus bill, on the ground that dangerous and treasonable conspiracies did actually exist.

The Society, of which Mr. Holcroft was a member, seemed with the progress of these events to increase in amazement; and it might almost be said, in stupefaction. This was visible in the thinness of its meetings, its feeble resolutions, and long adjournments. Each man saw himself the butt of obloquy. Each man knew that Mr. Reeves's association was sitting in a room of the same tavern immediately over his head; and that this association was the focus of the opprobrium cast on them all. They supposed themselves to be watched by the very waiters. Thus wantonly

and unjustly set up as a mark for public reproach, it is not much to be wondered at, that some petulant ebullitions occasionally burst forth. But was this guilt so enormous? Was it high-treason?

When Mr. Holcroft first heard that a few of its members had been taken into custody, he felt the greatest astonishment. "Surely," he said "either there have been practices of which I am totally ignorant, or men are running mad!" The persons apprehended were severally, and some of them repeatedly examined before the privy council. The three estates of the kingdom had declared the existence of treason and conspiracy; and the nation seemed generally to credit the assertion. Mr. Holcroft had been told more than once, that a warrant was issued against him. Incredible as the

rumour would have been at any other time, he now believed it to be true.

A warrant having according to report been issued against him, made it probable that he should also be examined before the privy council; and he therefore prepared for the event. The late John Hunter, and other medical men, had prescribed sea-bathing for him; and he intended to have gone out of town for this purpose. But on the first report of the warrant, he determined not to go, and took care to appear publicly, that he might not seem to evade inquiry. Many surmises and rumours prevailed during the summer of 1794. One week the persons in custody were immediately to be brought to trial: the next it was said the crown-lawyers had declared that a case of treason could not be made out, and that they would be tried

for seditious practices. At length, when the affair seemed almost to have sunk into forgetfulness, it was suddenly revived; and a commission was appointed on the till then supposed highly improbable charge of high-treason. The proceeding astonished Mr. Holcroft, as well as others; but he had no idea it was intended that he should be involved in it.

Soon, however, assertions to the contrary were spread: and many serious reflections suggested themselves to his mind. "Surely," said he, "this age has more general information, and therefore more virtue, more wisdom, than the past. There cannot be another meal-tub plot. No Titus Oates could now impose his execrable fictions on mankind. Or is it possible that sophistry may have convinced itself that it is better twelve men, the partisans of reform, should die, than that Go-

vernment should seem to have disgraced itself by asserting the existence of a treasonable conspiracy without any proof?" At one moment he could not believe himself in danger: at the next, the facts that stared him in the face destroyed every ground of rational calculation, and left the mind bewildered in suspense. It was at this period that Mr. Holcroft addressed the following letter to his daughter and her husband, who were in Devonshire.*

" MY DEAR FRIENDS AND CHILDREN,

" The reason of my writing to you at this moment is to prevent any unnecessary alarm; to which, indeed, I hope you would not have been very liable, even if I had not written, and if you had previously heard the

* Sophy, Mr. Holcroft's second daughter, had a little before been married to Mr. Cole, a merchant at Exeter.

strange intelligence I am about to communicate, through any other channel.

“ It is asserted in the Morning Post of to-day, and I have before received the same information from various people, that a bill is to be presented to the Grand Jury, containing a charge of high-treason against thirteen persons, of whom I am one. As it is impossible that either this or any other crime against the Government can be proved on me (my principles and practice having been so totally opposite to such supposed crimes) I hope, and most seriously recommend that you will feel the same tranquillity I do. The charge is so false and so absurd, that it has not once made my heart beat. For my own part, I feel no enmity against those, who endeavour thus to injure me; being persuaded, that in this, as in all other instances, it is but the guilt

of ignorance. They think they are doing their duty : I will continue to do mine, to the very utmost of my power ; and on that will cheerfully rest my safety. I must again conjure you to feel neither alarm nor uneasiness. Remember the most virtuous of men are liable to be misunderstood, and falsely accused. But the virtuous man has no need to fear accusation. If it be true that my name is in the indictment, it will oblige me again to defer the happiness of seeing you, and the hope of recruiting my health by the excursion. Of the latter it is true I have need, and to be a witness of your happiness would give me no small pleasure : but the man of fortitude knows how to submit to all necessities ; and if he be wise, frequently to turn events which others consider as most disastrous, to some beneficent end. Shall I own to you, that though I

could not wish to be falsely accused, yet being so accused, I now feel an anxious desire to be heard? Let my principles and actions be inquired into, and published: if they have been erroneous, let them become moral lessons to others; if the reverse, the instruction they will afford may more effectually answer the same purpose. I hope, Sophy, you know something of me: endeavour to communicate what you know to Mr. Cole, and your mutual fears will then surely be very few. Observe that, as I have yet received no notice whatever from Government, I have the above intelligence only from report. If it be false, I shall soon be with you: if the contrary, you of course will hear from me the moment I have any thing to communicate. Be happy, act virtuously, and disdain to live the slaves of fear."

Newman-street, Sept. 30th, 1794.

On the same day he sent the following letter to the *Morning Post*, which was published the next day.

" To the Editor of the Morning Post.

" SIR,

" In your paper of yesterday, my name is mentioned among those said to be inserted in a bill to be presented to a Grand Jury on Thursday next, containing charges of high-treason. If this be the fact, I have no wish to influence the public opinion, by a previous affirmation of my own innocence: I desire only to appear before my country. However, as I have not been a day absent from home for more than twelve months, and never received from any magistrate the least intimation of any suspicion against me; till I have official notice, my own consciousness obliges me to consider your intelligence as unfounded.

“In either case, it is a duty I owe myself to declare that I am now, and always shall be, ready to answer every accusation.”

The see-saw of contradictory reports continued for some days. A daily paper asserted, and as it professed, with authority, that the rumour of Mr. Holcroft's being included in the indictment was absolutely false : and a friend, who had determined (should it prove true) to give him every aid in his power, quitted town the very day before the bill was returned. Mr. Holcroft was preparing to do the same. Not only he indeed, but all his friends had concluded that the report would prove false, it being so excessively improbable. In this mistake he remained till Monday, October 6th, at three in the afternoon ; when another friend came running to inform him that he had that moment come from Hicks's Hall,

where he had heard an indictment for high-treason read against twelve persons, of whom he was one. Mr. Holcroft's sensations were of a kind not easily to be described; but he neither felt excessive indignation, excessive alarm, nor any of those passions which might perhaps have been excusable in his situation.

The friend who had brought the intelligence, felt less determined. He was a man of an acute mind, but a lawyer; and knowing the equivocal spirit of law, and the hazard incurred from the ignorance or prejudice even of the best-intentioned jurymen, he advised immediate flight. Mr. Holcroft had, however, no great difficulty in convincing him that his resolution was taken. He had now to communicate the event with as much caution as possible to his family. And here he had a most painful scene to undergo,

His father (who was now with him) in a passionate burst of tears, intreaties, and exclamations, conjured him to fly. His age, and the circumstances in which he had lived, rendered him a very unfit counsellor for such an occasion; and the only means Mr. Holcroft had of calming his agitated spirits, was by the firmness of his own behaviour, his declared resolution to face his accusers, and, by appealing to his own knowledge of him, how far it was possible he should be guilty.

The intrepidity of his behaviour inspired his parents and children with courage. He thought it prudent however to leave them, that he might consult with his own mind, and with some friends, concerning the properest mode of surrendering himself; and learning that the court was to meet the next day, at Hickes's Hall, he went to the house of his solicitor and friend, Mr.

Foulkes, where, with some other persons, he supped. He did not return home, but slept here.

The next morning he appeared in court, accompanied by his solicitor and another gentleman of the law; where, as soon as the business of the court would permit, he thus addressed himself to Lord Chief Justice Eyre.

Mr. Holcroft. “My Lord, being informed that a bill for high-treason has been preferred against me, Thomas Holcroft, by His Majesty’s Attorney General, and returned a true bill by a Grand Jury of these realms, I come to surrender myself to this court, and my country, to be put upon my trial, that, if I am a guilty man, the whole extent of my guilt may become notorious; and, if innocent, that the rectitude of my principles and conduct may be no less public. And I hope, my Lord, there is no appearance of vaunting in

assuring your lordship, this court, and my country, that, after the misfortune of having been suspected as an enemy to the peace and happiness of mankind, there is nothing on earth, after which, as an individual, I more ardently aspire than a full, fair, and public examination.—I have further to request, that your lordship will inform me, if it be not the practice in these cases, to assign counsel, and to suffer the accused to speak in his own defence? Likewise, whether free egress and regress be not allowed to such persons, books, and papers, as the accused or his counsel shall deem necessary for justification?"

Chief Justice. "With regard to the first, Sir, it will be the duty of the court to assign you counsel, and also to order that such counsel shall have free access to you at all proper hours. With respect, Sir, to the liberty of speaking

for yourself, the accused will be fully heard by himself, as well as by his counsel; but with regard to papers, books, and other things of that kind, it is impossible for me to say any thing precisely, until the thing required be asked. However, Sir, you may depend upon it, every thing will be granted to the party accused, so as to enable him to make his defence.—If I understand you rightly, you now admit that you are the person standing indicted by the name of Thomas Holcroft.”

Mr. Holcroft. “That, indeed, my Lord, is what I cannot affirm—I have it only from report.”

Chief Justice. “You come here to surrender yourself; and I can only accept of that surrender on the supposition that you are the person so indicted. You know the consequence, Sir, of being indicted for high-treason. I shall be under the necessity of ordering

you into custody. I would not wish to take any advantage of your coming forward in person, indiscreetly, in this manner, without being called upon by the ordinary processes of the law. You should have a moment to consider whether you surrender yourself as that person."

Mr. Holcroft. "It is certainly not my wish, either to inflict upon myself unnecessary punishment, or to put myself in unnecessary danger. I come only as Thomas Holcroft, of Newman Street, in the county of Middlesex; and I certainly do not wish to stand more forward than an innocent person ought to stand."

Chief Justice. "I cannot enter into this point. If you admit yourself to be the person indicted, the consequence must be, that I must order you to be taken into custody to answer this charge. I do not know whether you

are or are not Thomas Holcroft. I do not know you; and therefore it is impossible for me to know whether you are the person stated in the indictment."

Mr. Holcroft. "It is equally impossible for me, my Lord."

Chief Justice. "Why then, Sir, I think you had better sit still.—Is there any thing moved on the part of the crown with respect to this gentleman?"

Solicitor General. "My lord, as I consider him to be the person against whom a true bill is found, I move that he be committed."

Chief Justice. "I do not know how many persons there may be of the name of Thomas Holcroft: it would be rather extraordinary to commit a person on this charge, if we do not know him."

This produced a short consultation between the solicitor general, the other counsel for the crown, and Mr.

White. They were evidently surprised, and not pleased, at his appearance; and one of them, Mr. Knapp, began an argument to prove that he admitted himself to be the person indicted. He was interrupted by the Chief Justice, who again asked if the counsel for the crown thought fit to move that he should be committed? which was accordingly moved by the Solicitor General; and he was taken into custody by a Sheriff's Officer, Mr. Cawdron.

After naming Messieurs Erskine and Gibbs for his counsel, Mr. Holcroft asked the bench whether he might be allowed an amanuensis, while he was preparing his defence; but this request was declined by the Chief Justice, unless it was urged on the score of health. Mr. Holcroft was really in a state of ill-health; but as that was not his motive for asking it, he would not take advantage of this circumstance.

The court then adjourned ; but he was detained three quarters of an hour ; the reason assigned was, that the warrant was making out ; but Mr. Holcroft believed the true reason to be, that the crown-lawyers were consulting how he was to be treated, and sending to the higher powers for instructions.

About half-past one o'clock the same day, a person came to Mr. Holcroft's house, in Newman Street, inquired if he was at home, and seemed at first unwilling to tell his business. He said he came from Mr. Munden ; but afterwards owned he was not a friend of Mr. Munden, but pretended that he had been with him to inquire Mr. Holcroft's place of abode. He repeatedly asked the Miss Holcrofts if they were sure he was not at home ; and they by this time suspecting him to be an officer, replied, he might search the house, though he might be assured

their father was not at home, for that he had never taught them to tell untruths; and to prove their sincerity, added, that he was gone to the Privy Council to surrender himself. "No;" answered he; "that he certainly is not; *for I am but just come from the Privy Council.*" He then shewed his watch, that they might take notice it was half-past one o'clock. Mr. Holcroft's daughters replied, that they might be mistaken, and if so, that he was gone to the Old Bailey.—Being now understood to be a messenger, they asked if he intended to come in and take their father's papers; for, on shewing his authority, he was at liberty to make any search. He replied, that *there was quite sufficient without the papers*; after which, he went away, saying, that if the accused had surrendered himself, it would save him trouble.

These circumstances being related to Mr. Holcroft, led him to believe that a messenger had been despatched from Hickes's Hall to the Privy Council ; and that to preserve the decorum of authority, this person had then been sent to his house : for the effrontery of surrendering himself was by his prosecutors and their partisans thought intolerable.

After waiting a considerable time, the warrant at length appeared, and the prisoner was attended to Newgate by the officer and one of the under-sheriffs ; both of whom behaved to him with great politeness. Here, instead of being committed to close confinement like the other persons accused, he was allowed the same liberty of walking in the court-yard, and visiting his fellow-prisoners, which is granted to persons confined for inferior crimes.

The step which Mr. Holcroft had taken, as soon as it was known, excited

the admiration of his friends, and probably of his enemies : though the latter were careful to keep this feeling within their own bosoms. The hireling prints of the day immediately began to pour out their dastardly sneers and mechanical abuse against him, converting an act of true fortitude, arising from conscious integrity, into the vapouring of a hypocrite, who wished to gain the reputation of courage without the risk. The following paragraph appeared two days after in the St. James's Chronicle.

“ Mr. Holcroft, the play-wright and performer, pretty well known for the democratical sentiments which he has industriously scattered through the lighter works of literature, such as plays, novels, songs, &c. surrendered himself on Tuesday at Clerkenwell Sessions House, requesting to

know if he was the person against whom the Grand Jury had found a Bill for High Treason. After some little altercation, in which Mr. Holcroft seemed to affect some consequence, he was ordered into custody. This gentleman seems so fond of speechifying, that he will probably plead his own cause in part, though Counsel were assigned him. *We do not understand he is in any imminent danger ; and suppose, from his behaviour, he has the idea of obtaining the reputation of a martyr to liberty at an easy rate.* We have that respect for some efforts of his talents, that we really hope his vanity will be gratified *with having run the danger, without suffering the punishment, of a traitor !*"

What a pleasant kind of government that must be, which is so fond of playing at this mock tragedy of indictments

for high-treason, with any person who wishes to gain popularity at their expense, that the danger arising from their prosecutions is made a subject of jest and buffoonery, even by their own creatures! This miserable scribbler seems not to have been aware, that while he was accusing Mr. Holcroft of vanity and shallow cunning, he was bringing the most serious charge against the Ministers; as if they trifled with the lives and characters of an individual, on such absurd and improbable evidence, that not only the person himself, but every one else, must laugh at his supposed danger. It was, however, in consequence of this fine opportunity, thoughtlessly afforded him by his prosecutors, for ensuring popularity "at an easy rate," that Mr. Holcroft was afterwards shunned by numbers of plain, well-meaning people, who were persuaded that high-trea-

son was a serious thing; that he was branded as "an acquitted felon;" that he became a mark for venal pens and slanderous tongues; that he met with continued unrelenting hostility in his attempts to succeed as a dramatic writer; that he was at last driven from his country as a proscribed man; that when abroad he was singled out, suspected, and pointed at as a spy; and that after he returned home, harassed by repeated disappointment, he closed a life of literary labour and active benevolence, with a fear that his name might remain as a blot upon his family after his death. And all this, because Mr. Holcroft had, by some strange accident, through sport or wantonness, been included in an indictment for high-treason: for his innocence was so notorious, that at the time he delivered himself up, he was insulted by the partisans of the Minister for having

wished to purchase the reputation of a martyr at an easy rate; and that he was afterwards acquitted without being even brought to a trial, there not being the least evidence, or shadow of evidence, against him. Mr. Holcroft was not only not called upon to make any defence, but he was prevented from making one, as altogether unnecessary and impertinent, the prosecution against him having been withdrawn. Could a prosecution of this kind reflect real disgrace on the person so accused and so acquitted?

Locked within the walls of Newgate, Mr. Holcroft had full time for meditation. His first duty was to defend himself by shewing the falsehood of the accusation: but it was a duty which at this time he knew not how to discharge. He had no documents, nor could he tell of what he was accused.

He had remained in this suspense a

few days, when Mr. Kirby, the keeper of Newgate, one morning came, desired that he would follow him, and led him through the otherwise impassable gates to an apartment in his own house. Here he was introduced to Mr. White, the Solicitor for the Treasury, and his two clerks; and this gentleman presented him with the indictment, a list of witnesses, and another list of the jurymen summoned for these trials: informing him at the same time that the Crown would grant as many subpoenas, without expense, as he should think proper to demand. Mr. Holcroft received the indictment, bowed, withdrew, and was re-conducted to the place of confinement.

His eagerness to examine the charges brought against him, the list of the witnesses who were his accusers, and the names of the persons by some of whom he was to be tried, was great:

so was the astonishment he felt after examining the papers. He was indicted with eleven other persons in the same bill, for whose actions he was to answer, when, or wheresoever committed, though totally without his knowledge or participation. There was not a specific statement of any one action of the prisoner: but general affirmations concerning the collective actions of twelve men, together with other unknown conspirators, which, with regard to himself at least, he knew to be absolutely, and without exception, false. A promiscuous list of 208 witnesses was also given him, nine-tenths of whom were utter strangers to him, in person, abode, and even name; and of whom not one had any possible charge to bring against him. Yet he was left, out of all this inexplicable confusion, to conjecture (if he could) who were his accusers; and of what they

were to accuse him. Mr. Holcroft intended to have entered a protest to this effect against the indictment, but he was overruled by his counsel.

The Tuesday following the trials began. "And perhaps this country," says Mr. Holcroft, "never witnessed a moment more portentous. The hearts and countenances of men seemed pregnant with doubt and terror. They waited, in something like a stupor of amazement, for the fearful sentence on which their deliverance, or their destruction, seemed to depend. Never surely was the public mind more profoundly agitated. The whole power of Government was directed against Thomas Hardy : in his fate seemed involved the fate of the nation, and the verdict of Not Guilty appeared to burst its bonds, and to have released it from inconceivable miseries, and ages of impending slavery. The acclamations of the Old

Bailey reverberated from the farthest shores of Scotland, and a whole people felt the enthusiastic transports of recovered freedom."

Though no person partook more largely than Mr. Holcroft of the general joy, it was not on his own account. It was a conviction which he could not get from his mind, that his accusers had never any intention of producing evidence against him. Yet knowing how dangerous it might be to be found unprepared, he had laboured at his defence with the same ardour as if he were sure of being brought to trial: and the belief that he should not, was the only thought that gave him pain. To be thus publicly accused, and not as publicly heard, to have it supposed through the kingdom that he was involved in transactions, which though surely not treasonable, were such as he could not but highly disapprove, and

of which he never heard till the reports of the Secret Committee were published, this was an evil which he would have given his right hand to have avoided. After the trial of Mr. Tooke, he plainly foresaw that he should not be called upon for his defence. He hoped, however, that he should be permitted to state a few simple facts concerning himself in the open court: but neither was this allowed him.

Mr. Holcroft was committed to Newgate on the 7th of October, where he remained eight weeks within a day. On Saturday, November the 29th, he received the following notice.

“ The KING against THOMAS HARDY,
and others.

“ I am directed, by Mr. Attorney-General, to inform you that it is his intention that you should be brought to the bar at the Old Bailey, on Mon-

day morning next; and that a jury should then be sworn for your trial, but that he does not propose to give evidence against you upon this indictment.

JOSEPH WHITE,

Solicitor for the Crown,

29th Nov. 1794.

“ *To Thomas Holcroft,
one of the defendants in
the above indictment.*”

On Monday, December 1st, Mr. Bonney, Mr. Kyd, Mr. Joyce, and Mr. Holcroft, were put to the bar; and in the language of the court, honourably acquitted. The other gentlemen bowed, and retired: Mr. Holcroft attempted to speak, and the Chief Justice seemed at first willing that he should go on, though a thing not customary; but Mr. Holcroft having intimated that he should detain the court nearly half an hour, he was immediately ordered to withdraw. Whether he

was not wrong in expecting such a favour, and consequently in subjecting himself to a refusal, I will not here pretend to determine; but I confess it was a mistake, which men in general may safely blame, for it proceeded from motives which few persons are capable of feeling.

The chief circumstances which Mr. Holcroft meant to have stated in the defence he had drawn up, were, that his prosecutors had proof, that, instead of being a traitor, a mover of war and rebellion, and a killer of kings, he was a man, whose principles and practice were the very reverse. That evidence to this effect had been given before the Privy Council; and that there was no evidence whatever that he was in any instance a disturber of the public peace. That in the Constitutional Society of which he was a member, and under pretence of which he had been indicted

for high-treason, he was theoretically the adversary of all force whatever ; and that practically he concurred with the members who were most desirous of promoting reform, in urging that it must be by the peaceable means of persuasion, by the conviction of the understanding, not by force of arms. The proofs which Mr. Holcroft had of these particulars, were the evidence of Mr. Sharp, the engraver, and Mr. Symmonds. Mr. Holcroft having written to Mr. Sharp, desiring an account of his examination, received the following answer.

“ Copy of my [that is, Mr. Sharp’s] testimony, which I signed at the Privy-Council.

“ The Society for Constitutional Information adjourned, and left the delegates in the room. The most gentleman-like person (of the Corresponding

Society), took the chair, and talked about an equal representation of the people, and of putting an end to war. Holcroft talked about the Powers of the Human Mind."

"This" [says Mr. Sharp,] "is the whole that I signed. The other particulars of the conversation before the Privy-Council are as follows.

"Mr. Holcroft talked a great deal about Peace, of his being against any violent or coercive means, that were usually resorted to against our fellow-creatures; urged the more powerful operation of Philosophy and Reason, to convince man of his errors; that he would disarm his greatest enemy by those means, and oppose his fury.—Spoke also about Truth being powerful; and gave advice to the above effect to the delegates present, who all seemed to agree, as no person opposed his arguments. This conversation lasted better than an hour,

and we departed. The next time the delegates met, Holcroft was not present. This is the substance of what I remember of that conversation."

Mr. Sharp was again examined before the Grand Jury; and this was his evidence. "I mentioned Mr. Holcroft's disposition and conversation, when we met, about reasoning men out of their errors, who was a sort of natural Quaker, and was for the peaceable means that philosophy and reason point out to convince mankind. He was *against violence of all kinds*; but did not believe in the secret impulses of the Spirit, like the Quakers."

The evidence of Mr. Symmonds was to the same purpose.—Mr. Adams, also, the secretary of the Constitutional Society, had several times declared his utter astonishment that Mr. Holcroft in particular could be indicted; because of the repeated and ardent man-

ner in which he, and every body had heard him declare his sentiments in favour of peace and non-resistance.

On evidence like this was Mr. Holcroft indicted and committed to prison as guilty of high-treason.

The only circumstance which seems to throw any light on this mysterious transaction, which resembles a dream, or the extravagance of a bewildered imagination, rather than any thing real, is the following. Some months before the presenting the bill of indictment, Mr. Holcroft had called, with another friend, on Mr. Sharp, who had been apprehended, but was suffered to remain in his own house in the custody of an officer. Mr. Holcroft made some remarks intimating his dislike of violence. This the officer, who was a King's messenger, but of a lower and more illiterate order, seemed to feel as an attack upon his profession; and

turning to Mr. Holcroft, whom he no doubt conceived to be a dangerous person, he affirmed that he had seen him at the meetings of the Corresponding Society. This was denied; and he again asserted he had seen him there. The man who could imagine and persist in one falsehood, might imagine and persist in another. On his repeating his assertion, Mr. Holcroft said to him, "It is a wicked lie, Sir." The man afterwards said, that if he had not seen him at the Corresponding Society, he had seen him at Mr. Thelwall's lectures; to which Mr. Holcroft replied, that he had been present once, and never but once, at a lecture delivered by Mr. Thelwall. This short scene was, however, construed into a design to affront the officer, produce violence, and favour the escape of Mr. Sharp; over whom, on the man's reporting this tale at the

Privy Council, a double guard was placed the next day.

Such is the history of the share which Mr. Holcroft had in the trials for High Treason.*

* The remainder of Mr. Holcroft's pamphlet is taken up with Letters to different persons concerned in the prosecution, and the larger defence which he had prepared in case he should be brought to a trial. They evidently shew more virtue, firmness, and honesty, than prudence or management, and denote something of the raised tone of the public mind. In the letter to Erskine, which is a truly eloquent composition, the following trait is mentioned. While Erskine was examining the spy Alexander, who, had he not been detected, might have sworn away the life of Hardy; this eminent barrister, observing his downcast countenance, and suddenly interrupting him, exclaimed—"Look at the jury, Sir! Don't look at me. I have seen enough of you."

Mr. Holcroft, in the second part of his defence, labours the point of a parliamentary reform; and among other proofs of the corrupt state of representation, cites the following curious one.

"The Borough of Gatton, within these two

years, was publicly advertised for sale by auction : not sold for a single parliament ; but the fee-simple of the Borough, with the power of nominating the two representatives for ever. On the day of sale, the celebrated auctioneer scarcely noticed the value of the estate. The rental, the mansion, the views, the woods and waters, were unworthy regard, compared to what he called an *elegant contingency* ! Yes, the right of nominating two members to parliament, without the embarrassment of voters, was an *elegant contingency* ! ‘ Need I tell you, gentlemen,’ said he, glancing round the room with ineffable self-satisfaction, and exulting in what he called ‘ the jewel, the unique, which was under his hammer ; need I tell you, gentlemen, that this *elegant contingency* is the only infallible source of fortune, titles, and honours, in this happy country ? That it leads to the highest situations in the state ? And that, meandering through the tempting sinuosities of ambition, the purchaser will find the margin strewn with roses, and his head quickly crowned with those precious garlands that flourish in full vigour round the fountain of honour ? On this halcyon sea, if any gentleman who has made his fortune in either of the Indies chooses once more to embark, he may repose in perfect quiet.

No

CHAP. IV.

MR. HOLCROFT may be considered from this time as a public character; for the remainder of his life in a great measure received its colour from his conduct on this occasion, and from the opinion and feelings of the public with respect to him. These were of course much divided. That he had been accused of high-treason, was sufficient to draw forth the hatred, execrations;

No hurricanes to dread; no tempestuous passions to allay; no tormenting claims of insolent electors to evade; no tinkers' wives to kiss; no impossible promises to make; none of the toilsome and not very clean paths of canvassing to drudge through: but, his mind at ease and his conscience clear, with this elegant contingency in his pocket, the honours of the state await his plucking, and with its emoluments his purse will overflow."

and unqualified abuse of one party ; that he was an object of the open and rankling animosity of this party, was in like manner the cause of the favour he received from the violent and vulgar of the opposite party. But there was a third class of persons, inferior in number, as they necessarily would be, of whom Mr. Holcroft might perhaps be considered as the head, namely, those, who being detached either by inclination or situation, from the violence of either party, admired him for the firmness and honesty of his behaviour, and for the bold but benevolent tendency of his principles. His principles, indeed, were of such a kind, that they could not but strike and win upon the admiration of young and ingenuous minds, of those whose hearts are warm, and their imaginations strong and active, and whose generous and aspiring impulses seem almost to de-

monstrate the efficacy of disinterested and enlightened motives over the human mind, till it is hardened, depressed, distorted from its original direction, and bowed down under the yoke of example and prejudice. In this view of the subject, indeed, we should be tempted to assert, that men do not become what by nature they are meant to be, but what society makes them. The generous feelings, and higher propensities of the soul are, as it were, shrunk up, seared, violently wrenched, and amputated, to fit us for our intercourse with the world, something in the manner that beggars maim and mutilate their children, to make them fit for their future situation in life.

That love of truth and virtue which seems at all times natural to liberal minded youth, was at this time carried to a pitch of enthusiasm, as well by the extraordinary events that had taken

place, as by the romantic prospects of ideal excellence which were pictured in the writings of philosophers and poets. A new world was opening to the astonished sight. Scenes, lovely as hope can paint, dawned on the imagination : visions of unsullied bliss lulled the senses, and hid the darkness of surrounding objects, rising in bright succession and endless gradations, like the steps of that ladder which was once set up on the earth, and whose top reached to heaven. Nothing was too mighty for this new-begotten hope : and the path that led to human happiness seemed as plain—as the pictures in the Pilgrim's Progress leading to Paradise. Imagination was unable to keep pace with the gigantic strides of reason, and the strongest faith fell short of the supposed reality. This anticipation of what men were to become, could not but have an influence on

what they were. The standard of morality was raised high : and this circumstance must excite an ardent emulation in the minds of many persons to set an example of true and disinterested virtue, unshackled by the prejudices or interests of those around them. The curb of prudence was taken off; nor was it thought that a zeal for what was right could be carried to an excess. There is no doubt that this system would be taken advantage of by the selfish and hypocritical to further their own views at the expense of others : but it is equally certain that it would add new force to the practice of virtue in the liberal and well-disposed mind.

Kind feelings and generous actions there always have been, and there always will be, while the intercourse of mankind shall endure : but the hope, that such feelings and such actions might become universal, rose and set

with the French revolution. That light seems to have been extinguished for ever in this respect. The French revolution was the only match that ever took place between philosophy and experience : and waking from the trance of theory to the sense of reality, we hear the words, *truth, reason, virtue, liberty*, with the same indifference or contempt, that the cynic who has married a jilt or a termagant, listens to the rhapsodies of lovers.*

The " Narrative of Facts," was shortly after followed by the " Letter to Mr. Windham," in consequence of the expression " acquitted felon," applied by him to the persons lately tried. This letter is written in the spirit of a philosopher addressing a philosopher. It is certainly one of the

* The above passage was written in a state of perfect security against the return of that pleasant phrase, *divine right*. Every thing is by comparison.

best productions of the day. It is temperate, firm, acute, and forcible. Of the spirit in which it is written, equally remote from insipid affectation, or vulgar abuse, the introductory paragraph may be given as an example. It is as follows.

“ SIR,

“ The members of the House of Commons have arrogated to themselves many customs and privileges; which they consider, some as rights to indulge in parliamentary invective, and others, as limitations to those rights. Personalities affecting members of that house, are contrary to order; but men, unprotected by the sanctified walls of St. Stephen's chapel, may be the objects of assertions, which, if made any where else, would subject the authors of them to such correction as the law affords; or as honour, half idiot, half démon, demands. For my own part, I should

never attempt to unsheath the sword of the law, much less the sword of the assassin: at least, if it were possible to oblige me to the former, the case must indeed be extreme. Under such defence as the law affords, I have been, and may again be obliged to shield myself against false charges; for I have no better public protection. But that a man of keen sensibility, and quick apprehension, whose distinctions and discriminations are frequently so fine drawn, and so shaded, that like colours in the rainbow, their mingled differences cannot be discerned; that a man who labours to be so cautious in his logic, should so often be hurried into the spleen of a cynic, the rashness of a boy, and the petulance of a child, is something extraordinary. There may be many such characters, but they are seldom so situated, as to obtrude themselves so frequently and

forcibly as you have done into public notice. However, when they do, they are well worthy the attention of the politician and the philosopher, the man of business and the man of science. My purpose in this address, is not to write a libel, or to display my talents for satire. It has a more worthy purpose. It is to warn you and the nation against the effervescence of your passions. The intemperance of public men is tremendously awful at all times; but when it plunges millions into all the miseries of war, it rises into inexpressible horror. It is strange, that from real benevolence of intention, mischiefs which fable ascribes to fiends, should be the result. Yet this apparent paradox has of late been too repeatedly, and too carefully proved. You, Sir, and that extraordinary man, Mr. Burke, whose kind, but erroneous heart, whose splendid,

but ill-employed talents, have led you astray, are among the examples."

It was not my intention to have troubled the reader with any farther remarks on the subject of the trial; but there is one passage in Mr. Holcroft's letter, which exposes the sophistry and the injustice of the phrase, which is the subject of it, in so clear and masterly a manner, that I cannot forbear quoting it.

"Figure to yourself, Sir, the first on the list of these acquitted felons, Hardy. What were his views? What his incitements? A man of no learning, excellent in his morals, simple in his manners, and whether they were wise or foolish, highly virtuous in his intentions. Do you imagine he meant to make himself prime minister? Were these the marks of a prime minister? Had he the daring spirit, the deep plans, and the towering genius of a

Cromwell? No one will affirm things so extravagant. He was a good and an active man in his endeavour to procure a parliamentary reform. This he thought, and I think, would have been the greatest of public blessings. For this he was tried, and declared NOT GUILTY. The whole country rang with the verdict, and the affections of the people were divided between joy at his deliverance and their own, and the contemplation of an innocent man, who had so long been in danger of the most dreadful and barbarous death, the merciless law decrees. Compare such a man to an 'acquitted felon', who has escaped by the means you have enumerated: a man, who so far from exciting the benevolent wishes of a whole people, keeps all who ever heard his name in a state of dread, lest he should meet them on the highway, or break into their houses by night,

and murder them in their sleep. Some such action, perhaps many such, he has already committed. At last he is taken; and knowing no better mode, they hope by his death to be freed from their fears. They are disappointed: a flaw in the indictment, a misnomer, or some technical blunder is committed: he is set free, and they are again subject to his depredations, and to all their former terrors. Will you affirm, Sir, that there are any common qualities, any kindred sympathies, any moral resemblance, between such a man and Thomas Hardy?—Whatever the feelings of the people of England were before these trials, be assured they cannot now endure a repetition of such odious falsehoods. You could not be then ignorant of the public sentiment, and in your burning haste to do right, you could not be guilty of this intolerable wrong, were

your imagination less heated, and your intercourse with different ranks of people more general. You may perhaps now and then hear a dissentient voice: but you usually mix with men, who, like the parrot educated on-board a man-of-war, can only repeat the same outrages, and the same insults. You hear nothing else, and nothing else can you say. Would, Sir, you would keep better company!"

The very just distinction which Mr. Holcroft draws between the errors of such men as Pitt and Dundas, who were actuated almost entirely by interest and ambition, and those of men, like Burke or Windham,* who were ac-

* Though the character of Mr. Windham, as a statesman and orator, was less developed at that time, than it has been since, it seems to have been justly appreciated by our author. He considered him as the disciple of Mr. Burke; and it is certainly some distinction to be able to under-

tuated almost entirely by imagination, system, and reasoning, shews that the

stand the arguments, and follow the enthusiastic flights of that great, but irregular mind. He is at present (with one exception) the ablest speaker in the House of Commons: but he is still, and ever will be nothing more than an imitator of Burke. There is in all his speeches, an infinite fund of wit, of information, of reading, of ingenuity, of taste, of refinement, of every thing but force and originality: but of these last, there is a total absence. All is borrowed, artificial, cast like plaster figures in a mould. The creations of his mind are as multiplied, and they are as brittle. Perhaps it may be thought that the want of originality is the last thing which should be objected to this delightful speaker, all whose sentences sparkle with singularity and paradox. But this effect is equally mechanical with the rest. Real originality produces occasional, not systematic paradox. He who always waits to contradict others, has no opinion of his own. It is as easy to predict the side which Mr. Windham will take on any question as to guess what the first old woman you meet, would think on the same subject; for you may be sure that his opinion.

letter-writer himself was not a vulgar politician ; joining in the common cry of a party.

CHAP. V.

“ **LOVE’S Frailties**” came out in the beginning of 1794, at Covent-Garden. This play met with indifferent success, of which the principal cause was a sup-

will be the contrary of hers. His creed is a sort of antithesis to common sense, and he is as much the slave of vulgar prejudices in always opposing, as if he always yielded to them. Originality consists in considering things as they are, independently of what others think, singularity is mere common-place transposed. The one requires the utmost exercise of the judgment, the other suspends the use of it altogether. [These remarks were written in 1810, before Mr. Windham’s death.]

posed allusion to political subjects in some passages. One of these in particular excited the most violent resentment; "A sentence in itself so true," says Mr. Holcroft, "as to have been repeated under a thousand different modes; and under a variety of forms and phraseology, to have been proverbial in all countries." This obnoxious passage was the one, in which Craig Campbell, when insulted by a fashionable coxcomb, who asks what profession he was bred to, says that "he was bred to the most useless, and often the most worthless, of all professions, that of a gentleman." In this comedy, the author has more pointedly than in any other, set up the claims of worth and virtue, against the arrogant assumptions of wealth and rank. That virtue alone confers true dignity, has however been the common-place theme of teachers of morality and religion,

in all ages. But such at this time, was the irritation of party feeling, that to exhibit the force of this trite maxim on the stage, seems to have been regarded as an innovation on common sense, and as big with the seeds of social disorganization.

“The Deserted Daughter,” “The Man of Ten Thousand,” “The Force of Ridicule,” and “Knave or Not,” successively appeared in 1795, 1796, 1797, and 1798. The three last of these appeared at Drury-Lane. “The Deserted Daughter,” and “He’s much to Blame,” were acted at Covent-Garden.

Of all these “The Deserted Daughter” was received with the greatest applause, and it is perhaps the best of Mr. Holcroft’s serious comedies. The characters of Mordent, of Lady Ann, and particularly of the faithful old servant, Donald, are drawn with great force and feeling. The character of

Mordent is that of a philosopher, moralizing on the passions and vices of other men, and hurried away by his own. He has abandoned, or refused to own a daughter, the offspring of a former clandestine marriage, in order to avoid the sneers of the world, and the contempt of the rich and powerful connexions of his second wife. He maintains and brings her up as a natural daughter, but without seeing or acknowledging her. This the girl, who has a high spirit and quick sensibility, resents as an unmerited punishment; and determines either to be suffered to cast herself at her father's feet, and for once receive his blessing, or to throw herself on the mercy of strangers. In consequence of this, she is decoyed into a house of ill fame, by one of the hoary priestesses of vice, under pretence of affording her employment at her needle; and here she

is in danger of falling into the hands of one of Mordent's profligate friends, who is himself accessory to the plot for carrying her off, at the moment that, by the indefatigable zeal of Donald, who had traced her to this abode of infamy, she is discovered to be his daughter. The scenes which follow this discovery are highly interesting; and through the whole of the character of Mordent, the conflict between a sense of duty, pride, and dissipation, is portrayed with strong touches of truth and nature. Cheveril is a lively, amusing character, and represents with a good deal of risible effect, one of those careless, good-natured young fellows, who would be thought "sad wicked dogs," but cannot prevail on themselves to do any harm.

Dorington, "The Man of Ten Thousand," may be considered as a benevolent Timon. After living in the most

splendid and profuse hospitality, he suddenly loses his immense wealth, and with it his friends; but he does not at the same time lose either his senses or his philosophy. He preserves in the midst of the most mortifying reverses, the same calm dignity, and evenness of mind. Great as this effort of heroism is, it is managed in such a manner as not to appear unnatural or extravagant. Olivia, his mistress, is by no means so interesting a character. She is the blemish of the piece. Her notions of virtue are too fastidious by half, and she exacts conformity to her standard of perfection, with a dogmatical severity, which would scarcely sit well on a Stoic. Neither is her behaviour explained to Dorington in so satisfactory a manner as it ought to have been. The subordinate characters of Herbert and Annabel are described with extreme tenderness and simplicity. They exhi-

bit an amiable picture of those qualities which often spring directly from a guileless heart, without the artificial refinements of sentiment or reason. Hair-brain is a character of the same school, and must have had a very good effect in the hands of Bannister, who played it. Kemble and Miss Farren were the representatives of Dorington and Olivia.

“Knave or Not,” as well as “The Man of Ten Thousand,” was brought out at Drury-Lane. Its success was not very flattering. The advertisement prefixed by the author to the published play, will explain some of the reasons of this, as well as describe the most striking features of the play itself.

“The unrelenting opposition, which the productions of the author of the present comedy have experienced for several years, is well known to those who pay attention to our public amusements. It is not for him to pronounce

how far this opposition has been merited by inability. Since the appearance of the *Road to Ruin*, his comedy of the *Deserted Daughter* only has escaped: and that, as he imagines, because it was not known on the first night of its performance, by whom it was written. *Love's Frailties*, *The Man of Ten Thousand*, and *Knave or Not*, have sustained increasing marks of hostility: so that the efforts made to afford rational amusement to the public, emolument to the author, and improvement to morals, have been rendered feeble, and almost ineffectual. In the last instance, one mistake appears to have pervaded the majority of the spectators. It was imagined that the author himself was as unqualified a libeller of mankind as *Monrose*: in which character the writer's individual sentiments were supposed to have been incorporated. Those who have read his other

works cannot surely attribute to him any such indiscriminate misanthropy. The accusation that has been most generally made against him is, that he thinks men capable of gradations of virtue, which others affirm they can never attain. Persons, who have made the human mind their study, have discovered that guilty men exert the whole force of their faculties to justify their own course of action to themselves. To this principle the writer was strictly attentive in portraying the character of *Monrose*. His design was to draw a man of genius, misled by his passions, reasoning on his actions, systematising them, condemning them in principle, but justifying them in practice, and heating his imagination by contemplating the crimes of others; that he might still retain that respect for himself, of which the strongest minds, even in the last stages of vice, are so tenacious.

How far that spirit of faction, commotion, and anarchy, of which the author has long been, and is still, so vehemently accused, is to be traced in the present comedy, may now be seen. Sincerely desirous of giving no offence, the passages which were most disapproved, or to speak more accurately, reprobated, on the first night, have since been omitted in representation ; but they are printed between inverted commas, that the cool judgment may decide whether the author could have been so insane as actually to intend to inflame the spectators, and increase a spirit of enmity between men of different sentiments : whom could he reconcile, he would account it the most heart-consoling action of his life.

“ Before the comedy appeared, all parties were anxious that no sentence or word should be spoken, which could be liable to misrepresentation. Some

few passages, therefore, are committed to the press, which never were spoken on the stage; particularly the passage, where Monroe inquires into his qualifications for being a lord. A few years ago, this would have been commonplace satire; and it is a subject of no little regret, that at present local and temporary applications are so liable to be made where none are intended."

The jealousy which was thus manifested of sentiments, either of liberty or public virtue, was perhaps as inconsiderate as it was unjust. When the tragedy of Cato was first played, at a time when party zeal ran high, the Whigs applauded all the strong passages in the play, as a satire on the Tories; and the Tories were as loud in their applause as the Whigs, to shew that the satire was unfelt. But the "horrors" of the French Revolution were, it seems, to become a Medusa's shield to

screen every species of existing vice or folly from the glance even of ridicule, and to render them invulnerable and inconvertible. To stickle obstinately for the abuses to which any system is liable is tacitly to identify the system with the abuse.

In the characters of Susan and Jonas in this play, Mr. Holcroft has been guilty of that common vice among the authors of the present day, of trusting less to the characters themselves, than to the persons who were to act them. They are well adapted to shew the powers of acting in Mrs. Jordan, and Bannister, who might probably make them amusing or interesting; but they certainly stand in need of this foreign aid to produce such an effect.

“He’s much to Blame” was acted at Covent-Garden in 1798, with great and deserved success. It is a truly elegant comedy. The characters, par-

ticularly that of Sir George Versatile, are amusing and original; and the situations, which arise in the progress of the story, give birth to some of the most natural and delicate strokes of passion. The scene at the masquerade; where Maria is discovered by Sir George, is perhaps the most striking; the unaffected and artless expression of her feelings produces an effect which is irresistible. The easiness of Sir George's temper, and the facility with which he accommodates himself to other people's humours, without any design or hypocrisy, are admirably described. The passions are less strongly moved in this comedy than in the *Deserted Daughter*, but they are moved with less effort, and with more pleasure to the reader. Neither has it any thing like the same bustle and broad effect as the *Road to Ruin*: but in ease, lightness, and a certain graceful simplicity, neither

sinking into insipidity on the one hand, nor “o’erstepping the modesty of nature” on the other, it is superior to almost every other modern production. It is the finest specimen Mr. Holcroft has left of his powers for writing what is commonly understood by *genteel comedy*.

The comedy of “He’s much to Blame” was offered to the theatre in the name of a friend; an artifice to which the author, notwithstanding his dislike to every species of insincerity, was obliged to resort more than once.

He informs us in a short advertisement that he was indebted for some hints in this play to *Le Complaisant*, a French Comedy, and the *Clavigo* of Goethe.

“The Inquisitor,” brought out soon after at the Haymarket, and “The Old Clothesman,” an afterpiece, at Covent-Garden, were unsuccessful.

CHAP. VI.

HAVING brought Mr. Holcroft's literary history down to the time when he left England, I shall throw together, in the present chapter, such private incidents as occurred within this period, and as have not been already noticed.

After the appearance of the comedy of *Duplicity*, in 1782, Mr. Holcroft left his house, in Southampton Buildings, and went to live in Mary-le-bone Street. He afterwards hired a house, for a short time, in Margaret-Street, in conjunction with his friend, Bonnevillè. In 1789, or the beginning of 1790, he removed into Newman-Street, where he continued till a short time before his going abroad, in 1799, when he took lodgings in Beaumont-Street, near the New Road.

In the year 1786, Mr. Holcroft first became acquainted with Mr. Godwin. This friendship lasted for near twenty years. It was broken off by an unhappy misunderstanding, some time after Mr. Holcroft's return from the continent; and they did not see each other, in consequence of the coolness that took place, till they met for the last time a little before Mr. Holcroft's death.

It was Mr. Holcroft who reviewed Mr. Godwin's celebrated work on Political Justice, in the Monthly Review, 1793. It may be supposed that the Review was a favourable one. Mr. Holcroft at this time constantly wrote articles in the Monthly Review, and was on friendly terms with Griffiths, the proprietor. But it seems the latter was considerably alarmed at the boldness of some of Mr. Godwin's principles, and still more staggered at the accounts he

had heard of them. He threw himself on Mr. Holcroft's known attachment to the interest of the Review not to commit its character by undeserved praise. Griffiths, however, probably found soon after that the *common place* character of the Review had been endangered ; and the first opportunity was seized to retrieve the mistake, by retracting their opinion *hautement* in the Review of Mr. Malthus's publication.

The marriage of Mr. Holcroft's eldest daughter with Colonel Harwood took place in the year 1796.

Immediately after his release from prison, in 1794, he hurried into Devonshire to see his daughter (Sophy), whom he believed to be dying. His apprehensions, however, were groundless. While he remained in the country, he had a fall from a tree, which had nearly proved fatal to him, and which brought on an occasional palpitation of

the heart ; to which he was ever after subject, on using any sudden or violent exertion.—Mr. Holcroft had, some years before, shortly after the appearance of the *Road to Ruin*, been attacked by a paralytic affection, which he believed to have been the effect of too severe and constant application. Indeed, when we recollect the number and variety of Mr. Holcroft's productions, it is evident that either his facility or industry must have been wonderful. Perhaps there is no instance of a man, who passed through so much literary drudgery in voluminous translations, &c. and who was at the same time continually employed in the most lively efforts of the imagination. His resolute perseverance in pursuits so opposite, and apparently incompatible with each other, is a proof both of the activity and steadiness of his mind.

The relaxations in which Mr. Holcroft indulged, were few and regular. He was fond of riding ; and, for some years, kept a horse, which had generally high blood in its veins. In 1787, he bought a poney of his father, which he valued so highly, that he refused to part with it for forty guineas. The French are not great equestrians ; and Mr. Holcroft one day amused himself rather maliciously, in making a friend from Paris mount this poney, who was extremely alarmed at the tricks he began to play, though he was really in no danger.

Mr. Holcroft also belonged to a musical club, of which Shield, Villeneuve, Crompton, Clementi, and Solomon, were members. From this he afterwards withdrew on account of the expense attending it.

His love for the arts sometimes sub-

jected him to temptations which were not consistent with strict economy. He once gave a considerable sum of money for a couple of Cremona fiddles at a sale; one of which he afterwards presented to his friend Shield.

It may be supposed that that part of Mr. Holcroft's time which he could spare from his studies, was chiefly devoted to the society of literary friends. He, however, gave few dinner-parties, and those were not ostentatious, and consequently not expensive. When a friend dined with him, a bottle of wine was usually produced after dinner; but with respect to himself, he was extremely abstemious in the use of liquor, and the habits of his friends were rather those of philosophers than Bacchanals. A little story, which the mention of this subject has brought to my recollection, paints the characteristic

simplicity of Mr. Holcroft's father in an amusing light. Shortly after Mr. Godwin's first acquaintance with Holcroft, he was invited to dine with him one day, when the old gentleman was on a visit to his son. After dinner Mr. Holcroft happened to go out of the room; and during his absence, Mr. Godwin helped himself to a glass of wine. This was remarked as a flagrant breach of the rights of hospitality by the old man, and he took the first opportunity to caution his son against Mr. Godwin "as a very bad man; for that while he was out of the room, he, Mr. Godwin, had taken the bottle, and without saying any thing, poured himself out a glass of wine."—This laughable discovery would hardly have been made, if considerable care and economy had not generally characterised Mr. Holcroft's table. He seems

indeed to have observed through his whole life, the greatest moderation, even to a degree of parsimony, in his mode of living. The only extravagance with which he could reproach himself was in the occasional gratification of that inordinate love which he had for every thing connected with learning, or the fine arts. A fine-toned instrument, a curious book, or a masterly picture, were the baits which luxury always held out to him, and to which he sometimes imprudently yielded. He once bought a complete set of the *Fratres Poloni*, though he did not understand the language in which they wrote. Books and pictures were his chief articles of expense : the former he might think necessary to his own pursuits as an author ; and the latter he looked upon as a lucrative speculation ; for it is not to be supposed that he often bought pictures unless

he considered them as a bargain. The worst of it was, that the ardour of his mind for whatever he engaged in, and that confidence in his own judgment, which is common to men of strong feelings and active minds, too frequently deceived him. Among the purchases which Mr. Holcroft at this time made, was one which he supposed to be the original picture of Sion House, painted by Wilson. He was eager to show this prize to his friends; and to one in particular, who expressed some doubt of its genuineness. To this Mr. Holcroft replied, by pointing to a touch in one part of the picture, which he said no copyist could imitate. A few days after, however, he came to the same friend, and told him that he had been right in his conjecture, for that he had now got the real original, and that the other was but a copy. He afterwards sold the copy to Bannister

for five guineas. The second purchase was a real Wilson, and one of the finest landscapes he ever painted.

Mr. Holcroft occasionally made excursions into different parts of England, and once or twice went to see his father, who seldom remained long in the same place. In 1788 he made a journey of this kind to visit him at Haslington in Cheshire. Of the particulars of this journey Mr. Holcroft has left an amusing sketch in a memorandum-book, which I shall here transcribe.

“ May 24th, 1788. Received a letter from my father, alarmed, supposed him dying. Went immediately to take coach. Set out on the 25th, in the Manchester Commercial Coach for Haslington. An ignorant Cambridge scholar, a boorish country attorney, a pert travelled officer, a vain, avaricious, rheumatic old woman, and a lov-

ing young widow. Dined at Holkliff in company with outside passengers. Pride of inside ones. Tea at Chapel Brompton. A sandwich at Lutterworth. Widow leaves the coach. Quaker taken up at Hinckliff, but four and twenty, conceived himself a wit, rude to the old woman. Breakfast at Litchfield. Resign my place to a distressed damsel, and ride outside to Stafford. Cankwood coal-pits. Village of Slade. Remembrance of former times, youthful distresses, ass and coals blown down, white bread of Rugely, pottery journeys, &c. Pleasant banks of the Trent. Various seats, parks, pleasure-grounds, &c. Quaker takes his glass at Stafford, becomes more talkative and rude, which he supposes witty. Is told he is carnally inclined, and becomes suddenly abashed. Such is the force of habit and education. Lose the lawyer, dine at Newcastle.

Quaker listens to learned poetical discourse on unities, Shakspeare, Moliere, Boileau, Pope, Gresset, Rousseau, Voltaire, Milton, &c. in raptures. Old woman displays her whole stock of great discernment, *i. e.* vanity. Stop at Talk. Waggon blown up: concussion felt several miles. Ostler of Talk o' the Hill going to see his sweetheart, drove down the hill for the waggoner: smith at work saw the gunpowder running out, and called to lock the wheel, or the waggon would be blown up. Was not heard, or it was impossible to stop the waggon. Horse's shoe supposed to have struck fire, and caught the train. Body of the ostler dismembered, and blown with one of the horses through the wall of a house; his leg and arm found some days after under the rubbish of a blown-down wall. All the horses killed. Many women and children killed, others

maintained—the glass of the windows shivered into their faces and breasts—their shrieks terrible. Deep sands of Cheshire. New-built village of Wheelock, between Haslington and Sandbach. Joy at finding my father in no danger. Simple hospitality of farmer Owen. News of my arrival spread through the village. Bashful, boorish curiosity. Village scandal. Informed of the character of each individual; one accused of pride, another of selfishness, drunkenness, &c. A brutal broken butcher, who had spent a good fortune, the pest and terror of the place. Runs naked at prison-bars in Crewe Park, is horse-whipped by the Squire's order. Informs against his brother Fox and farmer Owen; confuted, and punished for having killed hares himself, though unable to substantiate his own charge. Maims cattle, &c. Is the terror of my father.

Tricks of my father's landlord. Promises portions with his daughters, and when married, tells the husbands he will pay them the interest. Clerk of the parish, the barber, cobbler, ostler, and musician of the village. Lady's maid returned from her travels, visits the village and her friends, speaks gibberish, is reported to understand language better than myself. Psalm-singing vanity of the clerk humbled. Village ideas of London. Cheshire dairies. Excursion to Crewe Cottage. Poetic ideas. Returned to write down some lines, nearly extempore. Crewe and Sheridan. The first a great man among the neighbouring boors, and his own footmen; the latter in the House of Commons, among the first men in the nation, or in the world. Welch manners. Red woollen shirts. Sunday mirth. The women till the earth, the men sit and smoke. Goat's milk

rich. Went to Nantwich. Inscription on a house curiously built. 'Thomas Clease made this house in the XVIII yeare of the reane of our noble Queene Elezabeth.' Thomas Holcroft, a white-cooper at Boscow, near Ormskirk. Richard Fairhurst, farmer in the same neighbourhood, my father's first cousin. Dobson, his uncle. My father, born on Martin's Muir, removed to Sheepcote hills, went to school at Rudderford."

Mr. Holcroft's father lived in the latter part of his life near Knutsford, where he had married again. Mr. Holcroft allowed him 20*l. per annum*, which, with a little shop and garden that he kept, maintained him comfortably. He allowed 12*l.* a year to his widow after his death, which happened in 1797. A tomb-stone was erected to his memory by his son's desire, with the following inscription: "Here lies

the body of Thomas Holcroft, who departed this life—1797, aged 80. He was a careful father, a kind husband, and an honest man.” He was buried in Peavor church-yard, near Knutsford.

Mr. Holcroft's affairs soon after became considerably involved, partly through the failure of the polygraphic scheme in which he had foolishly embarked several hundred pounds, but chiefly from a run of ill fortune at the theatre. He was obliged to sell his effects, books, and pictures. These it may be supposed did not fetch near their value; and the parting with the two last, particularly his books, Mr. Holcroft felt almost as the severing of a limb from the body. His plan was to retire to the Continent, both for the sake of economy, and with a view to establish a literary correspondence, and send over translations of such works as

it might be advantageous either to the theatres or the booksellers to accept. Mr. Holcroft left England for Hamburg in May, 1799. Whether it was just that a man who had unremittingly devoted his whole life to literary and philosophical pursuits, who had contributed highly to the public amusement, who had never entered into the intrigues or violent feelings of any party, and whose principles necessarily rendered him an inoffensive and peaceable member of society, whose end was the good of mankind, and whose only weapon for promoting it was reason; whether it was just that such a man should become the victim of political prejudice, and because he had been once made the subject of a false accusation, should be exposed to unrelenting persecution afterwards from those who seemed to think that unprovoked injury could only be expi-

ated by repeated insult, is a question which may at least admit of doubt in the minds of most thinking persons.

Before Mr. Holcroft left England, he married Louisa, the daughter of his friend Mercier. Of his marriage with this lady it is needless to say more at present, than that Mr. Holcroft found all that happiness in it which he had promised himself from a union with a young, sensible, accomplished, and affectionate wife.

CHAP. VII.

OF that part of our author's life, which includes the last two years he spent in England before his going abroad, I am enabled to give the reader a more satisfactory account from his own papers.

During almost the whole of this time, he kept a diary, and though this diary is not filled with great events, or striking reverses of fortune, it exhibits a perfect picture of the life, habits, and amusements of a literary man. It is my wish to bring the reader as nearly acquainted as I can with the subject of these memoirs; and I know no better way of doing this, than by exhibiting in his own words almost every thought or circumstance which passed through his mind during the above period. From hence we may form some notion of the rest. This diary will occupy a very disproportionate space to the rest of the work; but if it should be found tedious, I shall have erred grievously in judgment. There are some personalities in the original which are omitted; and others which may still be thought improper. But I believe no greater liberties are taken

with the names of living characters, than are to be found in Boswell's Life of Johnson, and other sources of literary anecdote.

Mr. Holcroft began his Diary in June, 1798.—It is as follows.

“ I have long felt a desire to keep memorandums of the common occurrences of life, and have now made a determination which I think will not easily be shaken, to keep a

DIARY. 1798.

JUNE, 22nd.—Called on Mr. Armstrong, relative to my disease; advises me to take oil of almonds, and rhubarb. Called on Mr. Shield, saw him—On Mr. and Mrs. Opie, both ill.—Wrote to Mr. Reynolds, bookseller, to settle the account—Wrote to Mr. Colman, who called when I was out.—Went to Debrett's: the opinion of Mr. Weld is, that the force sent over by govern-

ment will be sufficient to quell the Irish insurrection *for the present*: believes Dundas averse to the coercion used in that country, and to the Beresfords, &c. R. Ad— says Windham, out of the house rails at the Irish system, that Lord Fitz—the D— D— &c. are averse to it; that the D— P— is for it, as well as that part of the cabinet, called the King's friends. Professor Porson dined with me: made as usual numerous amusing quotations, and among the rest cited the following passage from Middleton's preface, as one of the most manly, beautiful, and full of genius that he had ever read. "I persuade myself that the life and faculties of man, at the best but short and limited, cannot be employed more rationally or laudably than in the search of knowledge; and especially of that sort which relates to our duty, and conduces to our happiness. In these

inquiries, therefore, wherever I perceive any glimmering of truth before me, I readily pursue and endeavour to trace it to its source, without any reserve or caution of pushing the discovery too far, or opening too great a glare of it to the public. I look upon the discovery of any thing which is true, as a valuable acquisition to society; which cannot possibly hurt or obstruct the good effect of any other truth whatsoever: for they all partake of one common essence, and necessarily coincide with each other; and like the drops of rain, which fall separately into the river, mix themselves at once with the stream, and strengthen the general current."—It is indeed a noble and admirable passage.—Porson maintained that women are by nature and of necessity inferior to men; and that whipping is beneficial to youth: on both which points, I to a very consi-

derable degree, differed with him—But we rather declared an opinion, than argued a question. Having drunk about a pint of wine, he refused any more; which determination I was pleased to see. Mentioned the letters to Travis, and the orgies of Bacchus. Quoted Foote (Smirk in the Minor) and spoke of him, as he well deserves, with rapture—Went in the evening to the billiard table, but did not play. I go for exercise, because I find that walking without a motive wearies, not recruits the spirits: but my rule is never to play for more than a shilling, and never to bet, as I hold gaming to be a detestable vice. I am obliged to play for something in compliance with the custom. Returned and read a few pages of Pennant's tour in Scotland, which I began this day.

23rd.—Wrote a scene in "Old Clothesman;" walked to see Mr. God-

win; conversed of my disease; he wished me to consult Carlisle—Returned; wrote a letter to Mrs. Jordan, in behalf of Mr. Watts—Conversed with Mr. Webb at Debrett's, on the moral progress of mankind—Returned and saw Mr. Colman, from whom I now first learnt that the prologue and epilogue to the Inquisitor, advertised without my knowledge, and to be played this very night, were written by the prompter, Mr. Waldron—Accompanied Fanny two lessons; and went to billiards, played about a dozen games; felt internal pains that warned me; felt my pulse, and found it extremely quick; left off immediately, applied my thoughts to calm the arterial action, walked gently home; giddy, and considerably affected: took medicine, and went to bed. Soon after received accounts, that the Inquisitor was in part highly disapproved

of, and ridiculed. Mr.—— was of opinion that the story, notwithstanding, made a considerable impression upon the audience, which he considered as an impartial one; and that, on the whole, the feelings of the people were more for than against the play. In the course of the day, read more of Pen-
nant; the facts he collects are useful, and some of them curious; but his manner is disjointed, confused, and therefore dull.

24th.—Worked about an hour at my opera, [Old Clothesman]—Read Pen-
nant—Went to Colman, who seems fearful I should wish him to play the Inquisitor to his own disadvantage. Agreed to omit certain passages the next night: when he first read the play, his opinion was warmly in its favor, he then thought it perfectly safe. The ludicrous reception it met with from the audience has changed his opi-

nion. I have found the same effect produced on others, on various occasions. My opinion is, that it was not the play which occasioned the laughter, but the manner of performing it, aided by the gratification which the flippancy of criticism finds in flattering its own discrimination and superiority. The play will be printed with the passages retained (except one, which is trifling) that the reader of it may judge how far it was in itself calculated to produce, or to deserve laughter. Our theatres at present, (and from its smallness this theatre in particular) are half filled with prostitutes and their paramours: they disturb the rest of the audience; and the author and common sense, are the sport of their caprice and profligacy. Met. Perry for the first time since his release from Newgate; then Dr. Moore, who shewed me the list of the special

jury, summoned to try Cuthell, or Johnson, for publishing Wakefield's pamphlet.—Dined, Godwin and R—ce present. Godwin mentioned a Mr. — whom he and Mr. Fawcett,* on

* The late Rev. Joseph Fawcett, author of *The Art of War*, &c. It was he who delivered the Sunday evening lectures at the Old Jewry, which were so popular about twenty years ago. He afterwards retired to Hedgegrove in Hertfordshire. It was here that I first became acquainted with him, and passed some of the pleasantest days of my life. He was the friend of my early youth. He was the first person of literary eminence, whom I had then known; and the conversations I had with him on subjects of taste and philosophy, (for his taste was as refined as his powers of reasoning were profound and subtle) gave me a delight, such as I can never feel again.

The writings of Sterne, Fielding, Cervantes, Richardson, Rousseau, Godwin, Goethe, &c. were the usual subjects of our discourse, and the pleasure I had had, in reading these authors, seemed more than doubled. Of all the persons I have ever known, he was the most perfectly free from

a pedestrian ramble, went to visit at Ipswich: Godwin saying, that perhaps he would give them beds; if not, he would ask them to supper, and besides they should have the pleasure of seeing the beautiful Cicely, his daughter. They went, stayed some time, but received no invitation. When they came away, Mr. Fawcett said he had three questions to ask Mr. Godwin—How he liked his supper, how he liked his bed, and how he liked Miss Cicely (who had not appeared)? This occasioned me to remark, that the fault was

every taint of jealousy or narrowness. Never did a mean or sinister motive come near his heart. He was one of the most enthusiastic admirers of the French Revolution; and I believe that the disappointment of the hopes he had cherished of the freedom and happiness of mankind, preyed upon his mind, and hastened his death:

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probably not in the host, but in the hypocrisy of our manners; and that they ought to have freely said they wanted a supper, beds, and to see Miss Cicely. Spoke to Mr. R—ce on the morality of eating animal food: he said we had no right to kill animals, and diminish the quantity of sensation. I answered that the quantity of sensation was greatly increased; for that the number of living animals was increased, perhaps ten, perhaps a hundred fold, by the care which man bestowed on them; and that as I saw no reason to suppose they meditated on, or had any fore-knowledge of death, the pain of dying to them is scarcely worth mentioning. I ought however to have added, that the habit of putting them to death, probably injures that class of men (butchers) whose office it is, and that they communicate the injury in part to society. This evil I think

might be greatly remedied. Ritson joined our party in the evening.

25th.—Took my medicine as usual. Sent orders to Marshall, and others: Read the papers at Debrett's: they were uniform in decrying the Inquisitor. One critic, whom I believe to be a man of taste and candor, accused it of fustian, and various other vile defects.—Went to Tattersall's—the usual group there of horse-dealers, jockeys, and gentlemen: played three games at billiards, in Sharrard-Street—Saw Mr. S——, who thought but indifferently of the Inquisitor; alleging, however, that he could not hear, &c.—Went to Colman at the theatre, the Inquisitor then performing to the satisfaction of the audience; he therefore agreed to play it the next night; but was anxious, if the house was thin, that it should be laid aside. We agreed to wait the event, and con-

fer on Wednesday. Returned. Mr. S——, came to me from the play-house, to inform me, that the piece had on this second performance, been well received; that the actors, who played vilely the first night, were greatly improved, and that his opinion of it was very much changed.

26th.—Went to Paternoster-Row; conferred with Robinson on publishing the Inquisitor. He promised to consider the proposals I had made, concerning the sale of the whole of my copy-rights. Returned and sent the Inquisitor to press. Went to King's sale—bought the bible in Welsh, Polish, Danish and Swedish: likewise *Novelle di Salernitano* (scarce) and other books. Saw D'Israeli there, and Rogers, the poet, but did not notice the first. Went to Debrett's: numbers there, Lords Townshend, Thanet, &c. Messrs. Francis, St. John, &c. The expedi-

tion of Buonaparte, and the news of the defeat of the Irish at Wexford; the chief topics. The Irish, it was supposed, must for the present be quelled. Met Perry, and conversed with him on the Inquisitor; blamed by him for writing too fast. Called at Opie's in the evening; sat near two hours.—Much difference of sentiment between us, but little or no ill humour.

27th.—Read Pennant, and Bower's Life of Pope Alexander the Sixth. The general system of morals at that time in Italy must have been wretchedly depraved; or this pope, and his active, but wicked son, Cæsar Borgia, might have been admirable characters. They seem but to have excelled their contemporaries in wickedness. Saw Parson — at Debrett's, who described the sandy roads of the north of Germany as invariably heavy and bad. A noble man, who travelled post, was eighteen

days in going to Vienna; a journey of little more than 400 English miles.— Praised the wines of Hungary as the best in the world: those of the common inns in Germany as very bad. I read the three gazettes relative to Irish affairs, the defeat of the Insurgents, the capture of Wexford, the haughty answer of Lake to the terms proposed, and the evacuation of part of St. Domingo by the British troops. Returned to meet Colman, who broke his appointment. Wrote to him. Accompanied Fanny in a lesson after dinner. Mr. Geiseveiler played chess, and drank tea with us.

28th.—Considered my opera, but did not write. Read Middleton's dedication and preface to Life of Cicero; a man of uncommonly sound head and heart. Walked to Debrett's; nothing stirring. Colman came to me. The third night of the play under-charges:

promises, if he can, to perform it again with the new farce, that is, if the farce brings money. Played a lesson with Fanny after dinner. Visited Mr. Geiseveiler, and met there Dr. —, chaplain to the Austrian Embassy, and Mr. —, an emigrant, native of Brussels. The Doctor had the most literature, but the emigrant the most logic. The Doctor is a chemist, known to Mr. Nicholson, who, the Doctor says, has written the best chemical book in our language, meaning his "First Elements." They both reasoned on the expedition of Buonaparte, and both seemed inclined to think him gone to the East-Indies, either up the Red Sea, and from thence across the Little Desert, and by sea to the Carnatic, or down the Euphrates into the Persian Gulph, &c. Both were convinced, it could be no such trifling object as the capture of Malta, or any Mediterra-

nean Island. The blow, they supposed, was meditated against the whole of the power of England in India. The Doctor thinks with me, that Kant, who is at present so much admired in Germany, is little better than a jargonist. Returned; made some good notes for the character of Morgan, [in "The Old Clothesman"], and went to bed; but my imagination being awakened, I could not get to sleep till nearly one o'clock.

29th.—Worked at my opera.—At Debrett's,—Conjectures were made on Buonaparte's expedition, and the difficulties attending it. Weld of opinion that he would cross the Great Desert as the least difficult. The transportation of artillery, ammunition, cavalry, &c. over this tract, supposed by Mr. Godfrey to be impracticable. The march of Alexander was of a very different kind. Walked with the two Parrys, who were stopped by O'Bryan and

Maxwell concerning Fenwick's publication. The Bow-Street people, on a late trial, were affirmed to have perjured themselves. Ford was supposed by O'Bryan to have been exempt from this guilt. It was allowed he had behaved kindly to Arthur, but not uprightly in court. For my own part, I know nothing of these matters.

30th.—Went, after breakfast, to Mr. Stodart, but did not go in. Met Opie on my return. Thought myself recovering strength and activity apace. Sent into the city for proofs of the play, which were brought back. Corrected them. Wrote notes for a short preface. Received 17*l.* 16*s.* 10*d.* for my mare, which was knocked down on Wednesday for nineteen guineas at Aldridge's. In the course of this day's business, about two o'clock, leaning the pit of my stomach hastily over the edge of a desk, I was again seized with excruciating

ating pains in my stomach ; cold sweats and debility immediately followed, though the fit was, I believe, the least violent of the four, that I have now had. When it was somewhat assuaged, I was under the necessity of writing my short preface, my second note to W., and of correcting more proof sheets.

JULY 1st.—Read Boswell's Life of Johnson: the writer weak, vain, a sycophant, overflowing with worldly cunning: yet, owing to the industry with which he collected his materials, the book abounds in facts, and is amusing.

2nd.—Went to Mr. S——, paid him the hundred pound bill on Mr. Harris at six months, and received the balance: all accounts clear between him and me. Worked at my opera. Wrote scene 8 and 9, as far as "Do you hear how lottery tickets sell?" Satisfied at present with my alterations in the character of Morgan. Read the last proof of

the Inquisitor. Read Boswell after dinner. Visited by Messrs. Watts and B——, and Mrs. Revely. Music, Mozart and Haydn, till ten, Fanny the principal performer. I retired to rest in some pain, which increased in bed: dreamed that my body was severed above the hips, and again joined in a surprising manner; astonished to think I was alive; afraid of being struck or run against, lest the parts should be dissevered. Very angry at the thoughtlessness of a boy that gave me a blow, and again surprised that it had no ill consequences. This dream appears to be the result of the pain, and the waking thoughts I have had on the probabilities of life or death.

3rd.—Wrote to the Rev. G. Smith, under frank given me by Lord Thanet, containing two bank notes, value six pounds, for my father's widow. Worked at my opera a very short time. In-

formed by Mr. Weld that Dr. Pitcairne had been cured of my complaint. Characterised him as our ablest physician since the death of Warren. Related that the Doctor and Sir George Baker were present in Warren's last moments; that Sir George wished Warren to take an opiate, which he refused. Sir George desired him to give his reasons, and Warren, turning to the Doctor, said, "Tell Baker why I ought not to take an opiate to-day." Immediately after which he clapped his hand to his breast and exclaimed "it is come again," then presently expired. Read the Reviews and Monthly Magazine. In the evening called at Opie's: they not returned from Southgate! Sat with Mr. Nicholson till ten. One game at chess: conversed of my disease; of the present vicious enunciation of thought, and its evils to society: of a universal character which Nicholson is persuaded must

soon be invented, and come into general use : he himself inclined to execute the task, which he does not consider as very difficult : of Bramhead at Devonshire-House, and Arkwright : of Tooke, and the misapplication of his powers, the sacrifice of wisdom and virtue to the pitiful triumph of the moment.

4th.—Sent in Shepperson and Reynold's account, the balance 24*l.* 4*s.* in my favor. Worked an hour or better at my opera. No news at Debrett's, except Buonaparte said to have taken Malta.

5th.—Reading Boswell's Life of Johnson at breakfast, was highly gratified by the following assertion of Johnson : "I find myself under the necessity of observing that this learned and judicious writer (Lord Kaimes), has not accurately distinguished the deficiencies and demands of the different conditions of human life ; which, from a degree

of savageness and independence, in which all laws are vain, *passes, or may pass*, by innumerable gradations, to a state of reciprocal benignity *in which laws shall be no longer necessary.*" Visited C——, profuse in his display of chirurgical knowledge, an acute and thinking mind, disliking contradiction, tenacious of system, and generally systematizing: thought the mind ought not to endeavour to regulate disease, its influence being great, but, as he affirmed, prejudicial. Instanced, that people having wounds, by a close attention to their feelings in the affected part, increased its sensibility to a noxious degree; and that the bones which, he said (I think erroneously,) have themselves no feeling, had, by the attention of patients, fixed upon them when diseased, become entirely sensitive. He spoke of these as facts within his own knowledge. From my own ex-

perience I believe them to be true, and think with him, that the attention so fixed upon parts diseased, may be prejudicial; but from experiments made upon myself, if the attention be fixed with a tranquil, pacifying, and cheerful temper of mind, I am persuaded they highly benefit the sufferer. This I urged; but his opinion seemed fixed. Advised me to consult Pitcairne, but did not lead me to hope, either from himself or others, any degree of medical knowledge that should be efficient. What is called nature, that is, the changes that are continually taking place, is trusted to as the chief operator. Received the third volume of Ireland's Hogarth Illustrated. Clementi dined with us.

6th.—Read Hogarth, J. Ireland, vol. 3. Some valuable information, but wretchedly put together. Hogarth too irascible, and pushing his favourite

points to extremes : a man of uncommon genius, and though highly admired by some, most unjustly treated by others. If it be true, which I doubt, that he did not excel in the higher parts of his art, i. e. in the beautiful and sublime, what he has written, and what he has done, sufficiently prove, it was not want of power, but want of practice. He felt his wrongs too indignant-ly, and, in resenting them, wanted liberality. Manners are undergoing a great change ; and though just at present, an intolerant and acrimonious spirit prevails, yet there is much less ruggedness, asperity, and undisguised insult, than there was in his time. Saw B—— at Debrett's ; the health of Porson precarious. Called at Opie's ; he gone to see Hogarth's March to Finch-ley.

7th.—Gillies, B——, S——, called before dinner. Worked nearly one hour.

at the opera ; the scene of Frank and Morgan for and against speculation ; but as I grew warm with the subject, felt a pain similar to preceding sensations, which warned me, to desist.— Read Middleton's Life of Cicero, and the pain went. Reports of the day, that Buonaparte and four or five sail of the line are taken: but disbelieved at Lloyd's: and that the insurgents in Wicklow have surprised and totally cut off the Ancient Britons, a corps hated by the Irish for the mischief done them. Affairs of Boyd and Benfield deranged; both, it is said, from mean beginnings, had attained the utmost splendour of wealth. Boyd had been successively the chief money dealer in France at the commencement of the Revolution ; then in England, and for the Emperor: something like the cashier of Europe ; compared to Law for enterprise and capacity, and for proving the facility of

an impossible scheme. Read Boswell's Life of Johnson after dinner.

8th.—My spirits more cheerful, and my strength increasing. Read Boswell's Life of Johnson; practised a little music. Purcel, a flowing, impassioned composer—his harmonies original, yet natural; and his melodies the best of his day. Is it true, as Boswell affirms, that Corelli came to England to visit him, and that Purcel being dead, Corelli immediately returned? Mr. Foulkes, before dinner, gave me an account of Coigley, as well previous to his trial, as when sentence was passed, and at the place of execution: his sentiments generous, his mind undaunted, and his behaviour heroic. Mr. Godwin's conversation, as usual, was acute, and his ideas comprehensive.

9th.—Read Boswell. Wrote notes for the opera, with song, "Old Clothes to sell," and other alterations and ad-

ditions to the first exit of Morgan. Dined with Phillips (Monthly Magazine). Present F. the Cambridge man, Signor Damiani, Dr. Geddes, Pinkerton (Heron's Letters), and S——; the three last, Scotchmen. S—— rattled, but had read and remembered. Pinkerton said little. The Doctor rather fond of dull stories; a man of information, irascible, and pertinacious. Maintained that a gentleman who, following the common path through an orchard, plucked apples, put them in his pocket, and left a shilling for them at the house of the owner, committed so heinous an offence, that he might justly have been shot as a robber. He scoffed at the argument and possibility of the apples being more necessary to the happiness of the man who took them, than of the legal owner. The argument is indeed hypothetical, and should be cautiously

admitted. He treated the plea of benevolence, in the depredator's behalf, with equal contempt; and affirmed, he did not argue as a lawyer, but from principles of indubitable justice. I was his chief opponent, and for a moment caught some of his heat and obstinacy. One of his stories was of a Romish priest, who sent up to town to Coghlan, a Catholic bookseller, for three hundred asparagus, which the man mistook for Asperges, an instrument used to sprinkle holy water with. The joke was the bookseller's distress at not being able to procure more than forty or fifty in the time, and promising the rest. I forgot to mention Mr. B——, a teacher, who informed us the wife of Petion remains still persuaded that her husband is not dead, and that he will again appear as soon as he can with safety. I related that Petion, when in England, had once dined with me, that

he was so full of his own oratory, as to turn his back to the mantel-piece, as soon as he came in, and make a speech, which lasted till the dinner was on table; that as soon as eating gave him leave, he again harangued, and would with difficulty suffer himself to be interrupted, till he took his leave; and that, for my own part, I saw no marks of a man of great abilities, to which B—— assented. George Dyer came in after dinner. Except myself, I have reason to believe, that all the persons at table have been occasional writers for the Monthly Magazine. I walked slowly, and fed cautiously. The foolish question of whether the next century will begin the first of January, 1800, or 1801, was mentioned by F. with as much pleasure as his imagination seems capable of; for he had been present at two sumptuous dinners, and was likely to enjoy

several others. He revelled in the idea of disputes which produced wagers of eating and drinking, said they were very proper, and the more uncertain and confused the better. He, as a mathematician, had been appealed to, and had decided in favour of the year 1800. Geddes remarked, that there were pamphlets which shewed the same question was agitated at the beginning of the last century. To be sure, said F. it always will be a question, and it is fit it should be. Geddes was still more incomprehensible; for if I understood him, the century begins with the year 99. I asked him to explain: he said he could only do it by a diagram; but added, that after Christ was born, the year 1 was not completed till he was one year old; to which I answered, this I believed nobody would dispute. As I found they either did not understand themselves, or at least were

unintelligible to me, I dropped the question.

10th.—Left my card for C.—Mr. B. called. Has adopted the cant which from Germany has spread to England, of affirming Mozart to be a greater man than Haydn. In Germany, his theatrical pieces have given Mozart his great popularity: he was undoubtedly a man of uncommon genius, but not a Haydn. His life indeed was too short. Stoddart left his translation of Don Carlos. He has executed his task reputably: the fourth and fifth acts of the play are greatly confused. The first interview of Philip II. and the Marquis of Posa, is a masterly scene. The whole is unequal; in some parts, feeble; in others, tedious: and yet a performance of which none but a man of genius could be capable. It reminds the reader of Hamlet and

Othello, and of various passages in Shakespeare.

11th.—Read Boswell. Handel returned from the binders. Wrote Act 1 of the opera, but had some notes. Heard at Debrett's that when Pitt went to the levee, after his illness and duel, the king shook him by the hand, a thing unprecedented, and violating etiquette.

12th.—Called on C—. He supposes electricity and the human will to be the same; gave high praise to Count Rumford's experiments on heat. His imagination luxuriant, incautious, and daring. Dalrymple and the most scientific geographers, whom he met at the house of Sir Joseph Banks, are convinced of the practicability of conveying armies to India, by the way of Cairo, Suez, &c. This supposed scheme of the French still continues to be the common-place gossip of the day. Re-

vised and copied part of Scene 18. Dr. Black said at Debrett's, that Father le Roche was hanged twice, the rope breaking when he was half strangled, and that he cursed and swore violently at being so treated. Met G—— and O—— at Geiseveiller's. G—— characterised Laudohn as a practical rather than theoretical general; and Lacy as the reverse. Said, Laudohn was a severe and despotic disciplinarian; instanced a Colonel, at the attack of Novi, whose regiment was engaged, and he behind. Laudohn coming up, asked him if that was his proper place, and commanded him immediately to hasten and head his regiment. The Colonel obeyed. Laudohn, however, passing the same regiment some time after, again found the Colonel in the rear; and not waiting for any court-martial, or form of trial, shot him through the head. On another occasion, during

the war with the Turks, he sent orders to General Clairfait, who commanded a corps about thirty miles distant, to attack the enemy. Clairfait, a man of skill and courage, considered the superior numbers of the enemy, and their strong position, and disobeyed: but immediately dispatched a letter stating his reasons. Laudohn read the letter in presence of the officer who brought it; then tore it, and threw it on the ground. The officer asked with some surprise, what answer he was to take back. Laudohn replied, "You have witnessed my answer." The officer returned, related what had passed, and Clairfait immediately attacked the Turks, whom he routed. Laudohn when not in the field, nor employed in military duties, lived silent, reserved, and penuriously. At the beginning of the Turkish war, Lacy and others were employed; and the Emperor, accord-

ing, to G——, lost the greatest part of an army composed of 200,000 men. Laudohn was at length sent as commander in chief; and the moment he was thus employed, he became cheerful, pleasant, and generous; and in about a year, so frequently triumphed over the Turks, that he compelled them to make peace. During the public rejoicings for one of these victories, at Vienna, his name was emblazoned and repeated in a variety of ways; and the Emperor Joseph II. walking with Marshal Lacy to see the illuminations, said to the Marshal, "My dear Marshal, they don't mention a word of you or me." After the peace of Teschen, Frederick II. Joseph, and the Generals in Chief, dined together; and it was remarked, that whenever Frederick addressed Lacy, or the other Austrian Field Marshals, he never gave them that title, but said Monsieur Lacy, &c.:

and when he addressed Laudohn, who had not been honoured with that rank, he always called him Field Marshal Laudohn. The Emperor understood the reproof; and a few weeks afterwards, created him a Field Marshal. These particulars were told by G——. I do not know whether they are common stories; but they agree with the character of Laudohn, and are probably true. When G—— went, I conversed with O—— on Shakspeare, of whom he had no great opinion. Corneille, Racine, Crebillon, and Voltaire, he supposed the most perfect writers of tragedy. He held verse, that is, rhyme, to be essential to the French theatre; and urged the hexameters of Greece and Rome, and English blank verse. He was unwilling to allow it was much more probable, when the tone of passion is raised, for men to speak in hexameters than in

rhyme, or in alexandrines. I affirmed, they might still more easily speak in the blank verse of Shakspeare, which in reality is only an harmonious and measured prose. P. at Debrett's, when he had done with Lords and M. P.'s. spoke to me. Cornfactors are beginning to speculate on a bad harvest. After dinner, sat half an hour at Opie's. G. Dyer there.

14th.—Saw in the newspaper another of Garat's speeches at the court of Naples. Read one yesterday, which, for its pedantry and foppery, was highly ridiculous. Garat compares France to the ancient republics; and says she imitates them in sending out her philosophy and philosophers (himself one) to kings and states, and subjugated lands. There is something extremely offensive in the vapouring of this great nation, or, rather, of the persons who take upon them to govern and be the mouth-

piece of the nation, which certainly has the character of grandeur, both of virtue and vice; but which yet has a strange propensity, in certain points of view, to render itself contemptible.

15th.—Sir William B——, with his young son, called: he was lately knighted. Speaks best on painting, the subject on which we chiefly conversed: said that a notion prevailed in Italy, that pictures having a brown tone, had most the hue of Titian, and that the picture-dealers of Italy smeared them over with some substance, which communicates this tone; and added, that my Castiglione landscape had been so smeared. Of this I doubt. Repeated a conversation, at which he was present, when Burke endeavoured to persuade Sir Joshua Reynolds to alter his picture of the dying Cardinal, by taking away the devil, which Burke said was an absurd and ridiculous inci-

dent, and a disgrace to the artist. Sir Joshua replied, that if Mr. Burke thought proper, he could argue as well *per contra*; and Burke asked if he supposed him so unprincipled as to speak from any thing but conviction? No, said Sir Joshua, but had you happened to take the other side, you could have spoken with equal force. Burke again urged him to obliterate this blemish, saying, Sir Joshua had heard his arguments (which B—— did not repeat), and desired to know if he could answer them. Sir Joshua replied, it was a thought he had conceived and executed to the satisfaction of himself and many others; and having placed the devil there, there he should remain. B—— praised my portrait, painted by Opie; but said the colouring was too foxy; allowed Opie great merit, especially in his picture of crowning Henry VI. at Paris; agreed with me that he had a

beld and determined mind, and that he nearest approached the fine colouring of Rembrandt. Spoke in high terms of a picture by Fuseli for Comus, the subject (if I understood him) the entrance of the brothers to the release of the lady : and also of a landscape now painting by Sir F. Bourgeois. Played chess with Mr. Du Val. Conceived three scenes for the opera, and sketched two of them : one was suggested by hearing a man and woman wrangle.

16th Mr. P—— called, wishes me to read a manuscript tragedy written by himself. Wolcott lodges near him at Hampstead. P—— formerly attacked Steevens in his Heron's Letters, therefore they are not acquainted. Steevens quarrelled with the Hampstead Stage several years ago for not having kept him a place, declared he would not ride in it again, has kept his word, and daily walks to town at seven.

in the morning, and returns to dinner at three in the afternoon; keeps no company, except that he has an annual miser's dinner, that is, a very sumptuous one. P—— is now forty, reads much at the British Museum, which is four miles, all but a quarter, from his house, and is an hour, all but five minutes, regularly in walking that distance. Nothing at Debrett's. Mr. Godwin returned the first act of the opera with remarks, dictated evidently by the fear, that ill-success will attend me in future, as it has in some late attempts. The strongest minds cannot shake off the influence which the opinion of a multitude produces. Louisa Mercier dined with us. Read Boswell. Still the same loquacious parasite: to whom we are highly indebted for the facts he has preserved relative to Johnson, and I had almost said for the laughter he has excited at himself. He

is indeed, a most solemn, pompous, and important coxcomb. I never was in his company, but have frequently seen him in the streets. His grave strut and elevated head, with a peculiar self-important set of his face, entirely corresponded with the character he unintentionally draws of himself in his writings.

17th.—Read Boswell. The French at Turin: their thirst of dominion insatiable. It is a duty to calculate what will be the moral consequences of their vicious actions. I am sorry I have not the time (most men have more or less the abilities) for such calculations. Met Mr. Marshal, who did not much like the Inquisitor on the stage. Told me Robinson lamented, in a friendly manner, that I was not more careful of my fame. Perhaps I am mistaken, but though the Inquisitor was certainly no more than a tri-

fling effort, I still do not think it a contemptible one. The audience, Marshal says, were but little attentive to the story. Surely this was the fault of the performers. But the piece is printed, and if I am partial, will detect my folly. The topic at Debrett's was the two Sheares's, who have been executed for treason in Dublin. They were brothers, both in the law, but had little practice, because of their open and passionate declarations against government: were in Paris during some epoch of great conflict, mounted guard, wore the red cap, &c. as many or most other of the English did for their own safety, and are the sons of a wealthy banker, who I hear once was member for the city of Cork. In the course of the day I walked to Mr. Godwin's, King's, Covent Garden, Debrett's, and (after three games of chess in the evening), up Oxford Road and back to the

billiard-table with Mr. Geiseveiller, in all nine or ten miles, after which I played sixteen games at billiards. I imagine I confided too much in my strength, and took an excess of exercise, for I awoke between two and three in the morning, after getting to sleep with great difficulty, and found my sensations, or spirits, as they are called, considerably in a flutter, and my pulse very quick. I rose, threw up the window, and walked in the stream of air ; a short time after which I again went to bed and slept, but had very vivid dreams ; in one of them I was riding a race horse full speed over dangerous and steep places. This and other experiments seem to confirm the opinion of Dr. Parry, that there is an undue action of the arterial system. Sketched a short scene between Frank and Clara, and considered the arrangement of the second act of the opera.

18th. Corrected and transcribed the first scene, and wrote the duet Act 2. Met Brown of Norwich, and promised him a letter of recommendation to Hamburg. Parry, jun. at Debrett's, told him that the Emperor had issued a decree, by which persons having money in the bank of Vienna were required to advance 30 per cent. as a loan, for which the whole, bearing at present four per cent., should be advanced to five; but that persons refusing the further loan of 30 per cent. should receive no interest for the money already in the bank. Went to Hampstead, rode about a mile and a half. Pinkerton pleasant in manner, and apparently not ill-tempered. Professes to avoid metaphysical inquiry—his memory tolerably retentive of historical facts and biographical anecdotes.

END OF THE SECOND VOLUME.

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